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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["WELL," REX SAID, EARNESTLY, "IF TROUBLE COMES OF TO-NIGHT, REMEMBER I WOULD HAVE SAVED YOU FROM IT IF I COULD."]

VERNON'S DESTINY.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT was to become of them? They stood there at dusk, on a bleak January night, in a remote village, where neither of them had friends or acquaintances, with no possibility of getting away from it—a young man and a young woman in no wise related to each other! The full terror of the position hardly came home to Nell. She had not lived such a peaceful, secluded life. She literally had no idea of the blight this accident might cast upon her whole future. She was distressed and alarmed at the adventure; but, poor child, she never reckoned of the trouble it would bring to her. Reginald was the first to break the silence which had fallen upon them both when the railway official deserted them and retired to his own sanctuary, leaving them to get out of their difficulties as best they could. "We cannot stay here, you will catch your death of cold; you are shivering now!" "We must stay here," said Nell, a little

pettishly. "Didn't you hear him say we couldn't get a conveyance to-night for love or money, and I am sure it is too far to walk?" Rex stooped his head and fastened her fur-trimmed jacket more closely. It was as he had said; she trembled visibly, and in spite of his many faults, in spite of the wrong he meant to work her, a thrill of pity ran through him as he looked at her. She was so young, you see, and so childlike. "I never meant we could leave Raglan," he said kindly. "I fear we have no choice but to spend the night here, but we need not spend it in the open air. There must be an hotel of some kind, and we had better go there." Nell's cheeks grew very pink. Unsophisticated as she was, some instinct told her it was unusual for a girl to go to an hotel with a man who was neither her father, uncle, husband, or brother. "I had rather stay here," she said nervously. "Really I would, Mr. Travers." "I cannot let you do anything of the sort. Stay here for fifteen hours! Why, you would be pretty well frozen."

"But I don't like to go to an hotel." "I daresay it will be rather primitive, but I assure you some of these little village inns are quite comfortable. Anyway, it will be better for you than staying here." "I had rather stay." "You can't," said Mr. Travers, with a calm air of authority. "Very soon the station will be locked up for the night, and I don't choose you to be locked up with it. What should I say to Isa and your guardian if I neglected you like that?" A happy thought struck Nell. "Couldn't we telegraph to Mrs. Merton. I am sure she would send a carriage for us?" Travers frowned consciously; then he recollected himself. "You are not in London, Miss Charteris. I don't fancy you would find a telegraph-office nearer than Monmouth." It was a lie, and he knew it; but he had gone too far to stand at a trifle like that. He drew the little hand through his arm, and set off with his unwilling companion in the direction of the village inn. In summer it was a picturesque place; its

bright flowers, the sunshine which poured through the latticed windows, giving a very attractive air to the old-world abode; but certainly it seemed gloomy enough on this winter's night; and the very waiter, who answered Reginald's summons, looked as if he considered visitors must be demented to claim the hospitality of "The George" so far out of the proper season.

"Can we have rooms here for the night?" asked Mr. Travers, a little pompously; "we have lost the last train to Monmouth, and can't get on till the morning."

"Certainly!" the solemn waiter declared; "the gentleman would find first-rate quarters. Would he like dinner?"

Rex ordered a compromise between dinner and supper—a sort of high tea. Then a young lady, with many ringlets appearing, he confided Nell to her charge.

"Don't be long!" he said, quietly; "ten will be ready in half-an-hour, and I am sure you must want it!"

The young lady of the ringlets conducted Miss Charteris to a pretty little bedroom, hung with white dimity curtains. She promised to have a fire lighted while her guest was downstairs, and apologized for the present lack of it.

"We have so few visitors now. Summer is our season. Bless me, miss, how white you look! I hope you're not fretting at losing the train; we'll make you as comfortable as possible, as we told your brother downstairs."

Nell opened her lips to repudiate the relationship, then she closed them. Some strange mysterious instinct told her she had better leave the chambermaid in her mistake.

Downstairs, in a pretty low-roofed sitting-room, all angles and crimson curtains, tea had been spread.

Rex came forward to meet Miss Charteris, and led her to a place at the round table behind a tray of silver and china. He sat opposite. The contrast between their present surroundings and the stately dining-room at Merton Park was almost too much for Nell. In spite of her vague alarms a smile crossed her lips.

"How very funny it seems!"

"Does it?"

"That you and I should be alone here together. Just us two!"

"I fancy a good many other people have said the same thing, Nell!"

"Do you mean they have lost their train, and come here by chance like us?"

"No; but in summer time this is quite a noted place for people on their honeymoon, and when they sit down first at this round table I daresay they think, as you did just now, that it is strange to be here alone together!"

"Oh!"

She had flushed uncomfortably, but Rex went on with the subject.

"In summer time this would be a charming place to stay at—especially with one one loved."

Nell devoted herself to her chicken and new bread-and-butter. Rex watched her with a strange smile about his lips.

"I wonder what they are doing now? Oh! Mr. Travers, do you think the Major will be angry?"

Though she asked the question she never expected him to say anything but "No." The very idea of her kind, good guardian being angry seemed unnatural, only Nell felt nervous. She wanted Mr. Travers to persuade her it was just as she thought, and that the Major would never blame her for her misfortunes.

But to Nell's unmitigated surprise her companion's face grew very grave, and he made no attempt to comfort her.

"I am afraid so!"

"Oh! he couldn't!" said Nell, anxiously. "It wasn't our fault a bit, you know! How could we go to Monmouth when there was no train to take us?"

"How, indeed?"

"And we should never have made the mistake about the train if we could have helped it! Is it likely we should have been so foolish

as to spend a night here when we might be comfortably at home?"

Rex shrugged his shoulders.

"The Major is the best of men, but he has his prejudices. I fear he will never believe this accident was unintentional."

Nell looked up with frightened eyes.

"Why not?"

"Because he knows the pleasure it is to me to be with you!"

"You would have been with me at Merton Park!" persisted Miss Charteris.

"But not like this! I could not have had you to myself—would not have been alone with you as I am now! Nell, but for your sake I should be delighted at the accident which has given us these brief hours together."

"Why do you say but for my sake?"

"I am afraid what brings so much happiness to me may prove a trouble to you!"

The waiter came in and cleared the table. Rex put Nell into a low sort of lounging chair by the fire. A strange silence fell on them both. To her life's end Nell never forgot that evening; years afterwards she revisited the "George," and found she recollected every detail of the room. She sat with one hand supporting her head, and her eyes fixed steadily upon the ruddy fire.

Until his last words she had been perfectly at ease with Mr. Travers, now a nameless something made her shrink from his glance. She could not meet his eyes; she could not make an effort and leave the room; she just sat there, motionless, as a creature under a fatal spell.

"Nell."

"Yes."

"Are you angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry with you? It is no more your fault than mine."

"I don't mean that."

"What then?"

"Because I don't feel sorry for this chance, which has given you to me for a brief evening out of our lives."

"You will think of our strange adventures when you are in Australia."

"If I go there."

"I thought it was settled?"

"So it was."

"And that you were to start on Monday?"

"I had meant to."

"And have you changed your mind?"

"I may have to stay in England. Nell, you may need my protection."

Helen Charteris started.

"What can you mean?"

"My darling, don't let me hurt you. Oh, Nell! why must I, who love you, be the one to wound you? Don't you know that when the news of to-night's exploits get about you may find you need a defender—a champion."

"I don't understand," said Nell, in a strange, faint voice. "What strange things you are saying."

"The world is very evil, my darling. They may hint that our delay was not accidental; that we were lovers who, fate being against us, had chosen this way to wring a consent to our marriage from Major Merton."

"It is not true."

"It is true I love you better than my life. I told your guardian so a week ago; and he—he taunted me with your wealth—forbade me even think of you. He may give me a different answer now."

"Why should he?"

Rex hesitated.

"It may be, when he thinks of to-night, he will think it best that the companion of your adventures should be—your husband."

"It would make no difference."

"Wouldn't it?"

"No; I don't want any husband."

"Not one who loves you?"

"No."

"Poor little girl! Nell, if trouble comes of to-night, remember, I would have saved you from it if I could. And now you are faint and weary; you had better go to rest."

He held her hand in his, and felt it tremble. "Courage!" he whispered; "don't you know I would defend you against the whole world? Courage, little one; you have a faithful friend while I live."

And Nell—for the first time, perhaps, in her whole life—passed a sleepless night, and came down to breakfast in the morning pale, wan, heavy-eyed. Rex never remarked on her appearance, but he read its meaning aright. He knew she had not forgotten what he had told her.

"It is time to start," he said, calmly. "Nell, will you put on your things?"

The chambermaid waited on Nell with kindly care. Had she arrived in a carriage and pair, and brought her own maid with her, the girl could not have received more respectful courtesy.

She was back at Reginald's side in a few minutes.

"How white you look! You had better have a glass of wine. No, you must drink it, child"—as she tried to refuse—"or I shall have you fainting in the train, and that would never do, you know."

Nell stretched out her hand for the wine. She felt a strange weakness creeping over her, and thought, perhaps, he was right, and the stimulant would revive her; so she drank the contents of the glass he gave her, and found for a few moments it gave her new strength. She walked to the station at a brisk pace, and took her seat in the train as naturally as she would have done the day before.

"I am sure to send to Tintern to meet me," said Mr. Travers, reassuringly. "By twelve o'clock you will be safe under her care. My poor child, you look as if you had not closed your eyes all night!"

"I don't think I did."

"That will never do. I must make you comfortable now. Why, how you tremble! Surely you are not afraid of me?"

"No, but I wish I was at the Park, and our first meeting with my guardian safely over. Oh! Mr. Travers, if this were only to-morrow!"

"Poor child!"

"I feel so frightened," confessed Nell; "he is always so kind to me, and yet I dread the very sight of the Major's face."

"I am with you, Nell."

"Yes, but—"

"Well?"

"You are not my guardian."

"I wish I was."

He rolled a railway rug into a pillow, and put it under her head; then he took off his great coat, and, in spite of her protestations, spread it lightly over her.

"You will rest better so, and indeed you must try to go to sleep; you will feel ever so much better after a nap."

"I don't think it will be hard work," said Nell, with a faint smile; "I feel horribly sleepy even now."

In ten minutes she was sleeping as soundly and peacefully as a little child. Rex could not sit there watching her; it seemed to hurt him somehow to look at that sweet childish face, with the innocent purity stamped on its brow.

He moved away abruptly to the other end of the carriage, and, taking a "Bradshaw" from his pocket, seemed absorbed in its contents; and so, with perfect silence between them, the train sped onwards.

"I don't like it, Isa; I don't like it at all. I never felt more annoyed about anything in my life!"

The speaker was Major Merton, the same his own breakfast-room, and the time the moment when Mr. Travers and Nell were getting into the first train from Raglan the morning after the fatal expedition to the ruins.

"It will all come right," said Isa, sweetly. "You know, Jim, they couldn't make a train; and, clearly, from the time-tables, there was

not one out of the station after that they missed."

"I don't like it!"
"But what harm is there in it?" asked Isa, with the prettiest little air of innocent inquiry. "Surely, you know Rex would take as much care of Nell as he would of me?"

"But he is not her brother."
"He will take as much care of her as though he were. Depend upon it we shall see them back by the first train this morning in the best of spirits, all the merrier for their little adventure."

"You are such a child," groaned the Major. "You don't understand the importance of this. Don't you know, dear, if the news of last night's accident gets abroad, scandal's branded tongues will be busy with that poor child's name; she will never be able to hold up her head again—my dear old Colonel's daughter, too, whom I promised to cherish and look after as my own child! I declare, Isa, I feel ashamed of myself!"

"It is all my fault," said Mrs. Merton, penitently; "I should not have left them alone, but I thought Rex had his watch, and—"

"You had better have waited, even though you lost the train."

"Wouldn't you have been anxious about me, pray?" asked the little lady, wickedly.

"Of course; but don't you see, Isa, if you had had to spend the night at Raglan no voice could have been raised against that poor child—none."

"What can they say?"

"Heaven help her, I don't know! I would hush it up, if I could, but the whole household know the facts; it is quite impossible to keep the matter secret."

"You won't be angry with her, Jim?"

"With her, poor child? No. But I confess I feel savage with your brother."

"Poor Rex!"

"She is as innocent of the ways of the world as a baby; he knows perfectly the construction people will place on this wretched affair. To my thinking he should have left Miss Charteris at Raglan and come here himself, if he had to walk every step of the way!"

"But people can't really believe bad things of Helen," persisted Mrs. Merton—"a quiet, childish little thing like that. Now if she had been a giddy little flirt, of course spiteful things would have been said; but it seems to me a demure Quakeress like Nell might do anything."

"How little you know the truth. Things that would appear innocent trifles in other girls would be considered heinous sins if committed by my poor little ward."

"But why?"

"Because of her birth."

"Her birth! She is the daughter of Colonel Charteris; she possesses five thousand a year, and a very pretty little face. I should have thought that she could do anything!"

"And, as a fact, she could nothing. Even Nell's beauty and wealth told against her."

"But why?"

"Because they remind people of her history—or rather her mother's."

"I never heard anything of her mother."

"You were too young."

"Tell me, Jim?"

"It is an old tale now, but it made a great sensation at the time. Her father was the second son of old Lord Charteris. You never met such a handsome fellow; and as he had an enormously rich old godfather, who made no secret about making him his heir, few people were more run after. He might have married a duke's daughter. I never met such a favourite with women; they all ran after him; and yet, though he was kind and courteous to all, he never gave one of them the slightest cause to hope he would marry her. They said at last he was a sworn bachelor."

"And then?"

"He met her—his fate, I suppose. She was lying in a hospital, and she saved his life."

I believe he loved her the morning he saw her; but for a long time she held back. There was a sad story connected with her. She had been in a 'Refuge'—whether from poverty or crime was never proved. She told my poor friend she could not tell him her parentage; she could not introduce him to one of her family; she was an outcast from home and them; she did not even know if her parents lived; such a one, she urged, was unfit to become his wife. Well, he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer, and, as she loved him herself, in the end he got his own way—they were married."

"And then?"

"He was cut by every one of his family, and nearly all his friends. Instead of being a general favourite he was banished from every London drawing-room, for all were closed against his wife, and he would go nowhere without her. At last they went to India. They were just wrapped up in each other, and I fancy myself they got as most happiness, in spite of their social ostracising, as many people do. There was but one child—Nell. She was sent home to be educated, with the proviso she was to make no friends, and go nowhere. You see they could not bear the thought of her hearing her mother's story."

Mrs. Merton pouted.

"And you brought her here. You let me treat her as a younger sister, knowing what you did of her origin, Jim! I think you were quite right just now. I agree with you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The Major started.

Isola rarely spoke to him save in her most honeyed words; such language of this from her lips was perfectly astounding.

"My dear," he said gravely, "will you remember you are speaking to your husband?"

"Who has forced me to associate on intimate terms with a girl whose mother was cut by all London."

"Let the dead past bury its dead, Isola. Mrs. Charteris may have had grave faults (personally though, I always doubted it), but they are buried with her. Helen has no cause to blush for her parentage. She is the lawful grand-daughter of Lord Charteris, the holder of one of the most ancient baronies in England, and she will be presented to the Queen at the first drawing-room next season."

"If she is so immaculate, why did you say just now she had more reason to be careful than other girls?"

"Because this is a spiteful age, and though her mother's story can never shut her out from her proper place in society, any failing, any girlish levity of hers, would be judged with cruel severity just because scandal was once busy with her mother's name. I tell you, Isola, I would have given a thousand pounds willingly to prevent yesterday's catastrophe."

"You are not complimentary to my brother."

Major Merton sighed.

"My dear wife, I have made him welcome; he has been here for six weeks, and I do not think you can say I have let him feel I did not like him."

"But you do not."

"I do not. He is a type of man I have scant sympathy with. He must be hard on thirty, and he seems never yet to have done anything for himself. He has been a trouble on others all his days."

"He is going to Australia."

"He says so."

"Don't you believe it?"

"Yes, would a man who was set on earning a competence in a distant colony dawdle his time away as your brother has done lately? Would not the money he spends so lavishly on light gloves, white ties, perfumes, and cigars have gone some way to stocking that sheep-farm of which we hear so much?"

"I never thought you would be so ungenerous, Jim, as to cast my brother's poverty in my face."

"I never meant to, dear."

"You know we were poor when I married

you, as poor as church mice. If you thought it anything to be ashamed of you shouldn't have taken me."

"I am not ashamed of poverty, Isa. I respect your sister Irena more than I can say. Your eldest brother I cannot like. There is to me something contemptible in a man living on other people, and frequenting the society of those ten times richer than himself."

"Rex does not live on you?"

"I never said he did. I have had to supply him with pocket-money pretty freely of late. He had two hundred of me only last week. I suppose it has gone in *dear*."

"I did not know that."

"I don't grudge the money, child. Only I wish Travers had had the sense not to get into this muddle about the trains."

"What shall you do?"

"Do! There is nothing to be done but make the best of it. I have stated before the servants they will be at Tintern by the first train. Of course, we must drive and meet them. You had better take Nell to call on people pretty promptly, and relate the whole thing as an amusing episode. I shall take care to tell one or two old friends myself. I think between us we can make things pretty comfortable for the poor child, specially when your brother has left us."

"Need he leave us?"

"Isola!"

"If you think people will talk about last night, hadn't he better marry Nell?"

"Are you beside yourself, Isa?"

"I am sure she seems fond of him, and he is devoted to her. It would silence all reports, and be an excellent arrangement."

"I beg to differ from you"—never had she heard that tone from him before. "I should consider it a gross breach of trust if I allowed my ward to give her fortune to anyone connected with myself—ten times more so to a man without a shilling. Even if Travers were worthy of her I should insist on a three years' engagement for her to see the world, and prove she knew her own mind; but to let her, with her rich dower, just out of the schoolroom, not even introduced, marry a man like your brother—why, it makes my face tingle with shame to think of it."

"But if she loves him?"

"She need not marry anyone else; she can wait a few years, and see if he proves worthy of her. But she does not love him, Isola—of that I am sure."

"I thought it would silence people's tongues," protested Mrs. Merton. "You seemed so afraid of scandal."

"Your plan would provoke scandal more than anything else. Bad, indeed, will be people's idea of the position if I allowed my ward to give herself and her five thousand a year to a penniless adventurer."

"Jim."

"My dear, I can't help it. I have tried hard for your sake to like him, but I can't do it. There is something in his nature I can't get over. If we were the only two men on a desert island we should never be friends."

A telegram was brought in here, and handed to the Major.

A bright pink spot burnt in Isola's cheek.

"Is it from Rex?"

"Not it. Why should he telegraph when he will be here so soon? It is from Sir Guy Vernon."

"What can he have to say?"

"I feel puzzled myself. Lady Decima told me last night he had gone up to London, and would probably cross straight to Antwerp, and be away some months. Now just listen to this: 'Am escorting Miss Travers to Chesham by the ten o'clock train. Do not meet us, as my brougham will be there, and I will bring her on to the Park, as I specially wish to see you on important business.'"

"Two shillings!" said Mrs. Merton, who had been counting up the words on her fingers.

"I thought he was much too mean to send such a long telegram as that. Poor Irena! I pity her."

"Why?"
 "I don't like Guy Vernon."
 "You should not judge him from one brief morning call, Isola."
 "I do not."
 "I thought he had only been here once?"
 "He spent some time at Beauville-sur-Mer the year before I met you. We knew him pretty intimately."
 "That throws light on the subject."
 "How?"
 "He may be coming to ask me, as Irena's temporary guardian, to give my consent to their engagement. I must say it looks very like it."

The idea of her despised sister being Lady Vernon and a county dame was quite unbearable to Isola; but, she reflected, with his opinion of herself, Sir Guy would hardly care to become her brother-in-law.

"I don't think that will ever be. Lit is a good, quiet little thing, just fit to be the family old maid, and take care of the children. She is so plain, too, poor dear!"

"I never thought her plain."

"She has not one good feature in her face."

"But she is so bright and intelligent! She looks quite pretty when she smiles."

"I don't think she often does smile."

"We must do our best to make her visit a pleasant one, Isola. I should like her to enjoy herself at the Park."

"Lit is sure to do that."

"Why do you call her by that absurd name?"

"Because she was christened Irena, and Irena Travers grates on our ears. To be sure, she has Ione in between, but that was much too grand and romantic to suit her. I am quite sure if we thought for hours we should never find any other name that seemed so made for her as 'Lit.' She doesn't mind it—in fact, I think she likes it."

"You all of you have strange names."

"Only the elder ones; we descend into very prosaic ones afterwards. Mother had a religious turn once, and the children born while it lasted have Bible names. Poor things, it's a little hard on them."

"I don't think I ever saw you all together yet, Isola."

"I daresay not. Father is too poor to indulge in very spacious rooms. Any one of his present apartments would be hopelessly crowded if occupied by himself, mother, and the fourteen olive branches who compose the tribe."

"It is getting late."

"We have dawdled horribly; and then, you know, Jim, you have been very unkind to me, dreadfully unkind."

"I don't think so."

"I began to fancy once you cared more for about that child's comfort than mine."

"Isa!"

"And I got jealous."

"I feel answerable for her. She was left to my care by my dearest friend, and I desire, above all things, to do my duty faithfully to my trust, don't you see?"

"And me—have you no duty to me?"

"No."

"Monster!"

"Because," and he smiled fondly on her, "my duty to you is a pleasure—nothing else. To make you happy, to shield you from all sorrow, and keep you, as far as human love can, from even the shadow of pain. Why, that is not duty, Isa; it is the pleasure of my life."

She was touched in spite of herself. I suppose no woman was ever yet mated whose heart was *all* bad.

"Jim, I wish I was worth it."

"You are worth it, and far more."

She shook her head.

"You spoil me. I'm not as good as you think me. Sometimes I feel as if I'd done you some awful wrong—as though I ought not to have married you."

He bent and kissed her.

"Never think that again, sweetheart. I am content, and more than content."

He released her with a smile, and bid her

go upstairs and prepare for their drive. A simple, kindly man, the soul of honour himself, he attached no importance to her words of self-reproach. He thought she was nervous and upset by their conversation about her brother.

Major Merton had not been a soldier all his life without learning a little worldly wisdom. He knew his servants were all on the *qui vive* respecting the disappearance of his brother-in-law and Miss Charteris, so the moment he discovered there was no later train than the one by which his wife arrived, he took prompt measures, and announced that Mr. Travers and Miss Charteris could not return till the next morning.

No doubt there was an inn of some kind where the young lady could be received. As for Mr. Travers, at worst he could spend the night on one of the wooden benches at the station.

Annoyed as he was, the wily old soldier contrived to convey the impression that he saw nothing at all remarkable in the whole affair; and the servants, taking their cue from him, really came to regard the whole thing as an "accident that might have happened to anyone—you or me, don't you know!"

It was a warm, sunshiny morning, and the Major ordered round the basket-carriage which held four, and had a seat for the boy-groom behind. He meant to drive his wife to Tintern himself, for he judged if he were not to meet the couple of absentees the servants might make comments. Besides, Nell might have qualms as to her reception, and he wanted her to know as soon as possible. She would meet with nothing but kindness from himself.

"It's a lovely day, Isa; we shall enjoy the drive! Let me see, twelve o'clock the train's due, I think!"

"Twelve o'clock!"

Her voice shook as she spoke. Unlike her usual custom, she wore a small, black veil—perhaps it was this which prevented the Major from noticing the deadly paleness of her features.

They did not talk much during the drive; the Major did the largest share of what little conversation there was. It wanted just five minutes to twelve when he flung the reins to the groom and assisted his wife to alight.

"The train is signalled already, Isa; they must be here directly."

Mrs. Merton sat down; she shivered, in spite of her furs.

"I wish I had stayed at home. I am so cold," she said, discontentedly.

"Here comes the train now, Isa! Come with me. I want our two runaways to feel we are not going to upbraid them very much."

But instead of stopping near them the train went on to the other end of the platform. Mrs. Merton was a lady who never hurried herself unless it was for her own pleasure; by the time she and her husband reached the little group of passengers who had alighted the train had started.

There they were—nine people, all told. That was the number of human souls who travelled to Tintern by that particular train on this cold January day.

The Major looked from one to the other, first in surprise, then in dismay. He appealed to a porter to learn if this *were* really the train from Monmouth, and received the emphatic reply,—

"Yes, sure!"

Then a strange, dismayed anxiety took possession of the loyal old soldier, for just as sure as the porter had been of those nine persons being the passengers from the Monmouth train, so certain was the Major the two he sought were not among them.

An awful sense of failure seized him. His old friend had confided to him his dearest earthly treasure; he seemed to see the colonel's eager eye fixed on him, to hear the old familiar voice demanding his daughter; and she, alas! was—missing!

(To be continued.)

HIS QUAKER BRIDE.

—30—

CHAPTER III.

VAL CURZON'S afternoon tea was a decided success. Aunt Rachael was in a less condemning mood, more inclined to think favourably of her nephew than on the previous day.

Beyond a few mild reproofs with regard to extravagance and luxury she refrained from censuring any of Val's arrangements.

Perhaps Algy Cavendish's unexpected presence served to shield his friend from more open criticism. Val had invited him with an eye to this, fearing lest the unrestrained nature of a family tea-party might prove too much for him. Algy prevented Aunt Rachael from presuming too much upon her relationship.

The little man could talk well upon almost every subject under the sun. When by chance a dangerous topic arose in sight, and threatened to render Aunt Rachael severe and dogmatic, it was amusing to note how actively both men avoided it by turning up the nearest conversational opening to get out of its way.

Algy was like a chameleon. He could take more than one aspect, and he liked to display his powers. Before tea was over he had won golden opinions from Aunt Rachael as a sensible, modest, sober-minded young man, with nothing frivolous about him.

And Ruth! She was in a state of shy, silent rapture. Everything delighted her. The large pleasant room, containing so many beautiful objects for the eye to rest upon, the newness of her surroundings, the busy life in the street below, were alike welcome to one used only to grey, unbroken dullness.

Ruth liked Valentine's friend. He was a very amiable, interesting young man, she thought, one whose manner seemed to set her at ease directly, but most of all she liked Val himself.

Handsome, *débonnaire*, with the easy, graceful bearing imparted by extensive social intercourse and good breeding, Val was exactly the sort of man to take a young girl's heart by storm. And when that girl had seen only Quakers—good fellows, certainly, but sadly wanting in manly beauty and superficial polish, in *savoir-vivre*—the danger that she would fall in love with him was great.

Algy's eyelids had gone up a little on beholding Ruth. Her rare delicate beauty, emphasized by the graceful simplicity of her dress, had taken him by surprise.

"She would make a lovely Madonna," he mentally decided. "These fair innocent faces are almost perfect in repose. And the old lady wants putting under a glass case. She is too severe, too perfect, in her prim, dainty, charming old way for this workaday world. Will Val fall in love with his cousin? If he doesn't he ought to be ashamed of himself. But for Aurelia I would fall in love with her myself."

"You have proved very hospitable, Valentine," said Aunt Rachael, in her precise even tones. "Country cousins are not always so well received by their friends in town."

"I'm delighted to have you here," said Val, looking at Ruth as he spoke. "I want to take you to the Inventories to-morrow. At what time will you be ready?"

This was a bold stroke, but it failed to ensure success.

"I shall not be able to go anywhere to-morrow," Aunt Rachael replied decisively. "I expect a friend to arrive from Cornwall, and of course Ruth cannot go without me. Perhaps, before we leave London we shall avail ourselves of your kind offer, nephew, but, as I told you before, we did not come with the idea of indulging in any worldly pleasure."

Val was conscious of an unatful longing to take his aged relative by the shoulders and shake her. How obstinate and unyielding she was! It was some comfort to see his own disappointment mirrored in Ruth's grey eyes.

"I am sure Ruth would like to see the inventories," he persisted; "and you can't always be going to a Meeting, Aunt Rachael."

"Ruth cares but little for sights and pleasures, I am glad to say. She can wait until I am able to accompany her, Valentine."

Algy interposed by asking for some music. Without any pretty excuses Ruth rose at once, and went to the piano.

She played Mendelssohn's "Song without Words," at his request, in truthful, sympathetic style, Val standing beside her to turn over the music, while Algy good-naturedly devoted himself to Aunt Rachael.

"I am awfully sorry that I can't get permission to take you anywhere yet," murmured Val, as she ceased playing. "Aunt Rachael is more unbending than ever. I shall console myself, though, by giving you a daily call, unless you think you will get tired of seeing me so often, Ruth!"

She smiled up at him through some unshed tears.

The disappointment to her had been more bitter than he could realise, because her pleasures were so few.

His promise of calling daily had taken half the sting away, however.

"I shall be glad to see you," she said, frankly. "Yes, I do feel disappointed at not going anywhere. At the same time it is only a little thing, and I have always had to resign my will at the bidding of another. I am used to it."

How brave and patient she was, how submissive under circumstances that would have induced the majority of girls to rebel! Val's admiration and interest were steadily rising.

"I shall certainly come to Verney-street to-morrow," he said, as she rose from the piano, "and I will bring the books I promised to lend you with me."

"What have you done with the dogs?" she inquired, brightly; "I am so fond of dogs. I was getting quite intimate with yours yesterday. Have you banished them on our account?"

"Yes, but they shall come up if you are not afraid of them. I expect they've howled themselves pretty nearly hoarse by this time in the yard."

Jem, Miggs, and the puppies were accordingly summoned. They appeared in a state of intense excitement and delight, not unmingled with indignation at having been kept in durance vile so long.

Ruth knelt down and fed them with biscuits, Val watching her admiringly the while. Miggs placed her puppies one by one in the girl's lap, thumping her scrap of a tail against the floor, and glancing up with eyes full of maternal pride as Ruth fondled and caressed them.

"The vain old thing! She wants you to admire her progeny," said Val, laughingly. "It is a weakness that canine and human mothers share in common."

"And a very pardonable one," said Ruth, defending her sex, like a true woman, against masculine aspersions.

"Well, what do you think of my relations?" Val inquired when they had gone.

"The girl is charming, positively charming!" said Algy, effusively. "Fresh, simple, unaffected, yet with plenty of sense and intellect. I am rather afraid of the old lady. It is a pity that such a girl should be left entirely in her hands. She will spoil her in the shaping process."

"Just my opinion, yet I don't know how to prevent it. Poor little Ruth! I should like to rescue her from such well-meant tyranny before it has succeeded in darkening her life. If I could only give her a passing gleam of pleasure I should be glad."

"Where there's a will there's a way. You've got the will, now it remains to find the way. By-the-by, are you going to Lady Vernon's ball to-night?"

"Yes, I've got an invite. Are you going?"

"I am."

"Then needless to say, the fair Aurelia will be there. Is she as cruel as ever, Algy?"

"There isn't much spare sentiment about her. I can't say she treats me worse than she does other men though. It is one of the articles of her creed to profess hatred towards all men, you know."

"Of course; she belongs to the strong-minded sisterhood. That in itself would be sufficient to make me hate her. In my opinion, a female *savant* is the most objectionable creature under the sun."

"But Aurelia is an exceptional instance! Her learning only serves to render her delightfully piquant. She might be the offspring of a marriage between the Latin Grammar and Miss Braddon's latest novel."

"Well, I don't want to disparage your lady love, old man! If she satisfies you that is all-sufficient. Have you ventured to propose to her yet?"

"Propose! not I. That would be to lose her confidence, to render myself ridiculous in her eyes at once. No. I wait my time. Aurelia is not an ordinary girl, to be wooed in the ordinary way. I must overcome her dislike to men, or rather, I should say, to one man in particular, before I ask her to become my wife. Otherwise, the result would be failure, complete and absolute."

"How are you going to storm the castle of this Princess Ida?"

"I'm going to make use of her father, the Colonel. When my plan is thoroughly matured I'll unfold it for your admiring inspection."

Val Curzon and Algy Cavendish met again later on in Lady Vernon's spacious rooms, scintillating with lights and mirrors, fragrant with flowers, resounding with music, low, soft, languorous music stealing in upon the senses like a dream, full of vague, mingled pleasure and pain.

Val, who had evidently got Ruth upon the brain, was in no hurry to provide himself with a partner.

Algy, on the other hand, caught sight of his divinity, hurried across to her, and wrote his name on her tablets for several dances.

"You have taken more than your fair share," said Aurelia FitzMarkham, calmly. "Selfishness, and greed! Men monopolise those amiable qualities to such an extent I'm sure I wonder that any remain over—that a selfish or greedy woman should exist."

Miss FitzMarkham was a tall, self-possessed girl of nineteen, with short wavy brown hair, pretty short-sighted brown eyes, regular features, a piquant nose, and a firm little mouth. As a rule she wore glasses, that added to the attractive piquancy of her appearance, imparting a learned erudite air to rounded, youthful loveliness.

Aurelia was a Girton girl. She had passed countless examinations, once even high honours. Grave college dons had bestowed well-merited praise upon her, many an undergraduate would have been glad to possess her knowledge of Greek and Mathematics, Aurelia's strong points.

Blended with Aurelia's learning was a strong desire to assist in the emancipation of her sex from masculine thralldom. She wished to throw open all trades and professions to women, to gain electoral privileges for them. It would be hard to say what Aurelia in her grateful enthusiasm did not hope to achieve. She threw herself heart and soul into the struggle for supremacy; platform speeches came easy to her, the higher education of women was her favourite theme.

As a rule, young men fought shy of Aurelia FitzMarkham. They were afraid of her learning, and her caustic speeches. She treated them in such a cavalier manner that their *amour propre* was soon offended.

Algy Cavendish, however, had contrived to fall desperately in love with the pretty, clever man-hating girl. He was far too shrewd to ruin his chance of winning her by a premature proposal. He contented himself for

the present with sturdily standing his ground, and showing that he was not in the least afraid of her. His wit was as keen as hers, and in return for snubs and sarcastic speeches Algy generally contrived to give his lady-love "as good as she sent."

Aurelia recognised this, and in her heart respected the little man for being so plucky. No other line of action would have succeeded with her. Nevertheless, she was not going to allow her respect to appear upon the surface.

"I don't approve of indiscriminate acts of self-sacrifice," said Algy, lazily. "How do I know, if I were to resign one of my dances with you, that the man I gave it up to wouldn't laugh at me for being such an idiot. I don't mean to give it up. I can't possibly stand lower in your opinion than I do at present, Miss FitzMarkham."

"He hasn't even an atom of self-respect left," said Aurelia, witheringly. "Well, I suppose you must have the dances against which you have scrawled your name—that is, if I stay long enough."

"Why should you leave early?"

"I want to get papa away from that hateful woman, Mrs. Whycherley. He has been talking to her for the last half-hour. If I am not careful she will marry him before the season is over. Papa is a sad trouble to me. Look at them! Would you imagine that, at their age, people could be such idiots?"

Algy glanced across to the velvet lounge upon which Colonel FitzMarkham and his companion were seated.

The Colonel, a tall fresh-coloured man of sixty, with long grey whiskers—the true Piccadilly "weeper"—and a naturally boyish, mercurial air, was talking earnestly to Mrs. Whycherley, a well-preserved, handsome, middle-aged widow.

"But if you could once get him satisfactorily married he would be off your hands!" said Algy gravely, aware of the Colonel's weakness for matrimony and the trouble it entailed upon his daughter, of whom the old warrior stood in no little awe.

"Of course; but he never falls in love, as he calls it, with the right person," said Aurelia, flashing an angry glance in the direction of the culprits. "Last year it was actually a person serving in a shop. I only found it out just in time to carry him off to Nice by sheer force. The year before it was a young governess; now it is Mrs. Whycherley, of whom we know little or nothing. I'm quite sure she would make him miserable if I let him marry her, and I want to save him from such a fate, richly as he deserves it. Ever since I was fourteen I have been engaged in looking after papa, and saving him from the unsuitable marriage he is bent upon making. Our relative positions are completely reversed."

"Shall I try to find out what I can with regard to Mrs. Whycherley's antecedents?" asked Algy, compassionately. "Then you would have something definite to go upon."

"Thanks! If you only would I should be forever grateful. You can't wonder that I despise men when papa makes such a goose of himself, and wants so much keeping in order."

Algy and Aurelia danced together several times, while the Colonel and Mrs. Whycherley chatted amiably.

Unable to bear it any longer Aurelia swept up to them.

"Papa, I am ready to go home!" she said, imperiously.

"But, my dear, it's so early, and —"

"My head aches, and I can't stay any longer. I'm sure Mrs. Whycherley must be quite tired of talking to you and playing wall-flower. She will be glad to get rid of us."

The reluctant Colonel rose and Aurelia led him away, after exchanging a defiant, combative glance with her fair antagonist, the widow.

CHAPTER IV.

MAY had glided gently, pleasantly, brightly in June, the month of roses. Sunny skies and balmy air rendered even London endurable.

Aunt Rachael and Ruth Inglefield were still in town. A slight illness had prevented them from returning to Penwyr until the patient, Aunt Rachael, should be strong enough to bear the journey.

Val Curzon had kept his promise with regard to the daily call, becoming more and more enamoured of Ruth each time they met. Confidential intercourse between them was out of the question, since Aunt Rachael was always present when Val arrived with his offering of books or fruit and flowers. Yet Ruth regarded these visits as the one bright redeeming feature in her otherwise sad constrained young life. Could Aunt Rachael have guessed how much they meant to her—how every word and look of Val's was treasured up in the girl's heart—she might have hastened her departure, and done her best to stamp out the charming passion.

Not even to herself did Ruth confess that she was in love with her cousin. Such a confession would, in her opinion, have implied a lack of modesty. No, in her vague, timid happiness she shrank from sounding the depths of her own heart.

Life had suddenly become rich, and full, and precious, gliding along with an undercurrent of deep, passionate feeling akin to pain in its dreamy intensity. What had caused this change, and how long it would last? she dared not ask herself.

Meanwhile Aunt Rachael recovered, and spoke of going home in a few days. Home! the word sent a dreary thrill through Ruth. It meant the extinction of the soft, radiant, glowing light that was shining now upon her life, and transforming the world into a region of delight. How could she ever go back to that chill, dry, arid existence after having for a while gazed down upon such a dazzling vista of hope, and love, and happiness?

Home! That would mean saying good-bye to Val Curzon. The thought was too much for Ruth. She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed helplessly, desolately.

"Why, my dear little girl, what is the matter?"

The voice was Val's. He had stolen upon her unawares. Ruth sprang up with crimson cheeks, and strove to give him a tranquil, ordinary greeting.

"I—I was feeling rather dull," she murmured, confusedly. "How quietly you must have come in! I am not often so foolish, cousin Valentine. Only I am alone to-day. Aunt Rachael has gone to Brighton to see a friend there who is ill. She will not return till to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I have all the packing to do. We leave town, you know, the day after to-morrow!"

"Yes, and you have seen nothing of it beyond Exeter Hall," said Val, indignantly. "Enough to set any girl crying. Run upstairs, and put your things on at once, like a good, sensible, little woman. I'm going to take you to the Inventories; and your packing can stand over till to-morrow!"

"But what will Aunt Rachael say?" inquired the girl, half fearful, half delighted. "She will be so angry."

"Oh! I'll make things right with her. I'll say I carried you off by sheer force, in spite of Martha Browning's protest. Why, Ruth, you forget that we are cousins. Doesn't that give me a right to take you anywhere? Of course it does. Run away, and don't be long getting ready. We couldn't have a more glorious morning!"

His authoritative, masterful manner swept away Ruth's scruples like cobwebs. Surely Aunt Rachael could not be so very angry when Val explained the escapade to her in his airy, irresistible fashion!

She came down in less than ten minutes, looking very lovely in her grey dress and lace

cape, a compact little white bonnet, trimmed with salmon-coloured velvet, crowning her golden braids, a big lace sunshade in her well-gloved hand.

"Bless you! I hope you'll enjoy yourself!" said Martha Browning, heartily. "You've had no enjoyment since here you've been. You'll take good care of Ruth, sir," turning rather uneasily to Val. "You see, Miss Hargrave left her with me, and—"

"Don't worry yourself, Mrs. Browning. I admit your responsibility; but I am quite capable of taking care of Miss Ruth," said Val, with a smile. "I'll return her to you, safe and sound to-night, after the illumination. She must wait to see that, you know; and Miss Hargrave will forgive me for carrying her off when I tell the tale to-morrow. I'll say you did your very utmost to prevent it, that we left you the very image of rage and despair in the front hall. Now, Ruth."

He put her into a hansom, sprang in beside her, and they were soon bowling smoothly along in the direction of South Kensington.

"Oh, Valentine! what have you done?" said Ruth, her eyes sparkling, the delicate colour mounting in her fair face. "I'm quite afraid to think of to-morrow."

"To-day has got to come first," said Val philosophically.

He had planned the affair immediately on hearing Aunt Rachael express her intention of going to Brighton.

"I wish you would call me Val, Ruth. Life isn't long enough to get round Valentine so often."

"Will there be any music, Val, at the Inventories?"

"Music! No end. You can listen to the band on the terraces, then you can stroll into the Albert Hall, where there is always an organ recital or a concert in full swing, then band again, and so on. It's a perpetual feast of music."

Val felt her arm flutter a little tremulously within his as they passed the grand equestrian statue in the entrance, and descended the wide, shallow steps leading into the exhibition building.

The grandeur and vastness of it all awed and astonished Ruth. As she became accustomed to the feeling her enjoyment increased.

The machinery did not interest her much, but the jewellery, the china and porcelain, the art furniture, the musical instruments, evoked many an expression of wondering delight!

Ruth was fond of all things, lovely; and their absence, so far as her life at Penwyr was concerned, had often filled her with stifled regret.

"Look, Val!" she said rapturously, pointing to a superb dessert-service, the ice plates representing a large full-blown chrysanthemum, the spoons consisting of a pink bud with a long green stalk. "Are they not lovely? How I should like to be able to buy them! Although that is foolish," she continued, smiling at her own enthusiasm, "since I should have no place of my own to put them in, and we never give dinner-parties at Penwyr."

"That would be a more suitable purchase," said Val, pointing to a small yachting piano, painted a delicate ivory-white, with a spray of apple-blossoms across the front, and a white satin music-stool to match. "I should like to see you seated at such an instrument, Ruth!"

Some idea of purchasing it for her flitted across his mind as they walked away to another part of the building. Ruth had to see the Russian, Japanese, and Chinese departments, the Aquarium, the 'Graphic' room, the grounds, and all in one short day! As Val impressed upon her, they had no time to lose.

Many a visitor to the Exhibition turned to look after Ruth Inglefield as she went along leaning on Val's arm, regardless of the notice her rare, delicate beauty excited.

Val felt proud of his companion, more than ever bent upon winning her love, and rescuing her from Aunt Rachael by making her his wife.

Ruth was intensely happy. The fact of being with Val Curzon heightened the enjoyment of her stolen holiday, and rendered it a thousand times more precious. Without him the Inventories for her would have lost half their charm.

She had known so little happiness, poor child; she had had to husband that little so carefully that to have so much come at once seemed almost a wasteful luxury of bliss, a perfect rioting in delight.

"Shall we go into the grounds now?" asked Val, later on. "The band of the Scots Guards will be playing there directly."

"I haven't seen Old London!" replied the girl, gently. "I should so much like to see that first!"

"By Jove! no. I had forgotten Old London. It's by a long way the best part of the show. We can afford to spend just half-an-hour there, Ruth."

He watched her face as they went slowly through the picturesque, narrow street, with its admirable imitation of quaint, gabled houses on either side. The low-browed shops, each with its sign-board swinging over the door, the old-fashioned trades being carried on inside, the shop-people clothed in old-English costume, the air of antiquity that pervaded everything, increased her sense of wondering delight.

"We have drifted back to the middle ages," she said, softly, stopping to watch the skilful metal-workers. "How quiet, and peaceful, and old it all is! The rush and hurry of modern life seems shut out altogether. Oh, listen to the chimes!" as the giants on the church tower struck their bells, and "Poor Beattie was a Sailor's Bride" floated softly down in mellow, silvery notes. "Oh, Val! it is perfect! I could stay in Old London all day."

"Prithee, then, enter in, fair maid," said Val, laughingly, as they reached the sweet-shop, presided over by a very pretty girl. Don't you see the announcement?—'We have this day made Old London rock.' It would be rank heresy to pass without buying some."

As if in a dream Ruth Inglefield suffered Val to lead her upstairs and down, through galleries filled with exquisite art-furniture and church work, till they stood in Dick Whittington's parlour.

There was a rose-stall in the low doorway. Val bought some roses, delicious creamy half-blown buds, and handed them to Ruth, with a tender expressive look in his grey eyes.

"Gather ye roses while ye may," he murmured playfully, as he placed them in her hand.

She might have said that she had been gathering roses all day, the deep-scented, crimson-hearted, dewy roses of love's own planting.

It was a time of growth and expansion for Ruth. Ordinary moods and feelings no longer swayed her. The daring deed of which she had been guilty was forgotten. Completely carried away by the joy and excitement of the moment she surrendered herself to the inrush of fresh experiences, and thoughts of to-morrow had ceased to trouble her.

Just outside Dick Whittington's parlour was a wooden bench placed against the wall, exactly opposite to the clock tower. Ruth sat down on it to rest for a few minutes, not so much because she felt tired as from a reluctance to leave Old London.

The afternoon refugence, warm, golden, ethereal, the steady stream of well-dressed men and women passing up and down the quaint old street, the rich, heavy scent of roses coming from the stall round the corner, the melody of the chimes, sank deeply into her heart as she drank in the beauty of the never-to-be-forgotten scene.

"We really must go now, Ruth, or you will see nothing of the grounds," said Val, breaking in reluctantly upon her reverie.

With one last lingering look Ruth rose, and accompanied him from the enchanted spot.

"We can eat our ices and listen to the band playing in the kiosk at the same time," Val remarked, as they entered the grounds; "the refreshment pavilion is close to the terrace."

"Ices! I have never tasted them," said Ruth simply. "I suppose they are delicious in hot weather?"

"She has never tasted an ice," repeated Val gravely. "What sort of people are they who live at Penwyr, Ruth?"

"Not the sort of people to indulge in ices," said Ruth, merrily. "Aunt Rachael would denounce them as luxurious and unwholesome."

"You shall pass your own opinion upon them," said Val, taking possession of a little marble-topped table very near to the band, and giving his order. "I'm quite sure it will be a favourable one. It would be positively wicked to object to ice-cream, Ruth!"

They ate their ices, listened to the band, inspected the great conservatory, and devoted ten minutes to the Albert Hall, in which the great organ was booming away, filling it with waves of sound.

"I shall never, never forget to-day," said Ruth, when they were sitting on the terrace resting after their exertions. "It has been like a day snatched from fairyland. I am afraid Penwyr will seem duller than ever after this."

"You won't always live at Penwyr," said Val confidently. "And I shall be coming to pay you a visit before long."

Her sweet face brightened.

"You will run away again in despair. Penwyr is frightfully quiet. What should induce you to go there?"

"A variety of motives. Ruth, would you be sorry to leave Penwyr for good and all?"

"No," she replied, with sad frankness. "I have never liked it. But it is my home, and if I marry Ephraim Barclay I am not likely ever to leave it."

"Ephraim Barclay!" ejaculated Val, "who the deuce is he? I beg your pardon, Ruth, but I wasn't even aware of your being engaged. It has taken me completely by surprise."

"He is the doctor's son," explained Ruth, a dull, hopeless ring creeping into her voice. "He belongs to the Society of Friends, and it is Aunt Rachael's wish that I should marry him some day. We are not exactly engaged, but it amounts to the same thing."

"And of course you are no end in love with him?" said Val Curzon, coldly, mentally cursing the absent Ephraim for daring to exist.

"No, that is what troubles me," she replied, her fair face aflame, her eyes drooping. "I can't love Ephraim. He is good, and I respect him very much, yet—"

"One wants to be able to feel something stronger than respect for their future partner in life. Is it not so, Ruth?" he interposed gently, his brief fit of jealousy dissipated by her words. "You shall not be forced into marrying this man if I can prevent it."

"Aunt Rachael expects it of me," she faltered, "and I do not like to cross her wishes. She has been very kind to me since my father and mother died, leaving me quite unprovided for, and it is the wish of her heart that I should marry Ephraim Barclay. Yet I think of the two, if I could have my choice, I would rather die. He hasn't a desire beyond Penwyr, while I—I have so many."

"A marriage with him would crush you," said Val, fiercely. "Your fertile mind and warm, expansive sympathies require a wider social and intellectual horizon than Penwyr, and Ephraim Barclay can offer you. Ruth, darling, would it give you less pain to become my wife were I to offer myself to Aunt Rachael as your husband instead of Ephraim Barclay?"

"Your wife? Oh, Val! I did not even know you cared for me in that way!"

The tone was enough, so full of glad surprise, and perfect loving trust.

"How could I help it?" he asked, with the feeling of reverence aroused by her pure unworldly nature still strong upon him.

"Ruth, sweet angel, give me my answer in three words—I love you."

"I love you. Val, dear Val! I have done nothing to deserve such wonderful happiness. It almost frightens me. Are you quite sure that you have not made a mistake? I know that I am not like other girls, that I am ignorant and rustic—"

"Hush! that is why I love you, because you are not as other girls. You know nothing of coquetry, your nature is as clear as crystal. Love, candour, high principle, are the qualities I most admire in a wife, and you possess them all."

"And Aunt Rachael?"

"I am not afraid of her. She has been very gracious to me lately, and why should she favour Ephraim Barclay's suit before that of her own nephew? My strongest argument will be that we love each other, darling!"

The illumination of the grounds later on was a very beautiful sight. The falling, many-hued waters, the trees hung with burning jewels, the instantaneous transition from darkness to light, evoked Ruth's warmest admiration. Yet, in the midst of the fairy-like scene she was conscious of a yet deeper delight that would still be hers when the brilliant grounds had relapsed into silence and darkness—the knowledge of Val Curzon's love.

He took her back to Verney-street when it was all over. The reaction in Ruth's case from so much excitement was beginning to set in. She felt a little afraid of her own temerity.

"You will come to-morrow?" she whispered, as the cab stopped.

"Of course; until then say nothing. Now kiss me, darling, and run in."

She obeyed with the willing submission of love. Val waited until the door had closed behind her, and then drove away to his own rooms.

In the hall Martha Browning turned a frightened face towards the happy, radiant girl.

"To think that it should have happened so, Miss Ruth!" she said, despairingly; "your aunt—"

"Is that my niece?" asked a clear, cold voice from the top of the stairs.

Glancing hastily up, Ruth beheld Aunt Rachael and Ephraim Barclay standing by the drawing-room door in readiness to receive her.

CHAPTER V.

FEELING very much like a culprit in the presence of her judges, Ruth slowly ascended the stairs. As she did so, Aunt Rachael turned and re-entered the drawing-room. Only Ephraim Barclay stayed to speak to her.

"Why, Ruth, we could not imagine what had become of thee!" he said kindly, in spite of his vexation. He knew that Aunt Rachael was very angry with the girl, and, man-like, he dreaded a scene.

"I have been with my cousin to the Inventories," explained Ruth, hastily. "He has only just left me at the door. What has brought you to town, Ephraim?"

"Business," he replied dryly, leading the way into the drawing-room. "Thy aunt, who returned shortly after my arrival, has been in a sad state of anxiety about thee, Ruth."

Ephraim Barclay was a thick-set young man of medium height, with a square, fresh-coloured face, small, keen eyes, and mutton-chop whiskers. As an embodiment of sober, unemotional common-sense and respectability he was not to be surpassed.

Beyond this Ephraim Barclay's gifts did not carry him. Flooding, prudent, ambitious in his way, and fair dealing, caring nothing for pleasure, it would have been hard to find a more deserving, worthy and utterly uninteresting young man than Ruth's Quaker lover.

Once in the drawing room, Aunt Rachael

confronted her niece with a stern-set look on her fine old face, a look which Ruth secretly dreaded.

Aunt Rachael never stormed, but her great, deep anger when aroused was far worse to encounter than any sudden burst of passion.

"What is the meaning of this, niece Ruth?" she asked, coldly.

Ruth's sensitive conscience told her that she had done wrong in accompanying Val without her aunt's knowledge or permission. She was willing to be contrite, to confess herself in the wrong, so far as Aunt Rachael was concerned; but she felt strangely, pleasantly indifferent with regard to Ephraim Barclay's opinion of her conduct.

His anger could not affect her any longer—he had ceased to be of the least importance in her eyes. To-morrow, only to-morrow, and Val Curzon would assert his right to claim her, a right that she was ready to endorse.

"Cousin Valentine asked me to go to the Inventions Exhibition with him, and I consented," said Ruth, determined to shield Val as much as possible. "Aunt Rachael, please do not be angry with us. The day was so fine, and—and I wanted so much to go. He took every care of me, and brought me home as soon as the illumination was over."

"Thou hast taken advantage of my absence to be both disobedient and deceitful, Ruth," replied Aunt Rachael, severely. "Thy conduct has both surprised and disappointed me. Go to thy room at once. Thy cousin Valentine is also greatly to blame in this matter. I shall not forget to rebuke him when he appears in the morning."

This was an inauspicious prelude to the announcement of their engagement. It might go greatly against them. Aunt Rachael might refuse her consent.

Feeling very miserable Ruth turned in silence to leave the room.

Then Ephraim Barclay, swallowing his jealousy and vexation, good-naturedly interposed.

"It was but a girlish escapade," he said, kindly; "and, after all, Ruth was with her cousin, Aunt Rachael. Forgive her this once, and she will not offend again; of that I am certain."

For the first time in her life Ruth proved ungrateful. She was inclined to resent Ephraim's words. They might have borne reference to some naughty child whose punishment he wished to mitigate.

How different this blunt, patronising kindness to Val Curzon's caressing, reverent love and devotion! Ephraim Barclay, square, sturdy, homespun, sensible, without an atom of romance about him, suffered terribly from comparison with handsome, courtly, debonaire Val Curzon, a polished man of the world.

"I require no one to intercede for me," said Ruth, with a girlish dignity that made Ephraim open his eyes in astonishment. "If I have done wrong I am ready to accept the consequences. Perhaps my cousin's explanation, when it comes, will serve to lessen Aunt Rachael's anger against us both."

"What has come over her?" asked Ephraim, blankly, when she had disappeared.

Aunt Rachael shook her head.

"I cannot tell," she replied; "the child perplexes me sadly. I have always found her submissive and obedient until now. Perhaps I have done wrong in allowing Ruth to see so much of her cousin, who is, I regret to say, a thorough man of the world. Ephraim. Once back in Penwyr, however, his influence over her will quickly fade, and I shall take care never to expose Ruth to temptation by bringing her to London again."

"I shall be ready to marry her in three months' time," said Ephraim, calmly. "My father is going to take me into partnership with him, and the sooner that Ruth and I settle down to the duties of married life the better. She will have a careful protector then."

He loved Ruth in his quiet way, and feeling sure of winning her, no element of fear or

passion ruffled the calm surface of his Quaker nature.

"Verily, it will be a happy day for me when I give her into thy keeping, Ephraim," said Aunt Rachael in a softer tone. "Ruth is very dear to me, yet I cannot expect to live much longer, and I should like to see her married to a good trustworthy man like thyself ere I go."

Meanwhile the subject of these remarks was indulging in the luxury of a good cry before retiring to rest.

It was such an unpleasant ending to a delightful day, a very pearl among days! What could have brought Aunt Rachael home so unexpectedly? And Ephraim Barclay? His unwelcome presence in town, might serve to complicate matters, and render Aunt Rachael more unwilling to turn a favourable ear to Val's suit.

Ruth felt distressed and anxious, yet like golden gleams through a drift of grey clouds, the consciousness of Val's love, the happy hours they had spent together, came to cheer her.

Fate and Aunt Rachael could not be so cruel as to keep them apart.

When Val appeared, his easy well-bred, albeit imperious manner would place another complexion upon affairs. His silver-tongued eloquence would induce Aunt Rachael to relent and smile upon their engagement. No one could possibly resist Val Curzon's pleading.

With this cheering thought to console her Ruth fell asleep, to dream confusedly of Val, and roses, and mellow chimes, and dancing lights, till the sun awoke her by shining full in her face.

Early as Val Curzon was in arriving, Ephraim Barclay had taken the wind out of his sails by full half-an-hour. The Quaker was chatting amiably with the two ladies, when Val entered Martha Browning's little drawing-room.

"My Quaker rival, by Jove!" thought Val, swiftly, feeling both amazed and amused as he glanced in Ephraim Barclay's direction. "It must be he. Confound the fellow, how thoroughly at home he seems! What the deuce can have brought him to town just when he was least wanted?"

"Ephraim Barclay, my nephew, Valentine Curzon; my nephew, Valentine Curzon, Ephraim Barclay," said Aunt Rachael, rising and introducing the two men in orthodox Quaker fashion, while Ruth hovered timidly in the background.

A flash of recognition shone in Ephraim's small grey eyes as he steadily regarded the handsome young fellow in the irreproachable light suit for the space of a moment. Then a stern, almost contemptuous, expression overshadowed his square face. The hand that Val Curzon held out to him appeared to have escaped his notice. At any rate he did not grasp it.

Aunt Rachael looked perplexed, Ruth indignant. Val Curzon's self-possession was in nowise disturbed, however, by the young Quaker's unconventional behaviour. He merely lifted his eyebrows and thence towards Aunt Rachael, as if no eccentricity was to be wondered at in a man dating from the wilds of Penwyrr.

Ephraim understood the meaning implied, and the colour flew to his face.

"Mr. Curzon, you and I have met before," he said, roughly.

"Indeed! You have the advantage of me then. I was not aware that I had had the pleasure of meeting you before to-day," replied Val, carelessly.

The Quaker was a miserable nuisance. What right had he to be there at all, when Val was impatient to unburden his heart to Aunt Rachael and make sure of the woman he loved?

"Two years ago we were staying at the same hotel in Paris," continued Ephraim Barclay. "You cannot already have forgotten what happened then? I wish from my heart,

since you are related to Martha Hargrave, that we never had met."

"What do you mean?" demanded Val, wheeling abruptly round upon him. "Is it your intention to insult me, Mr.—ah—Barclay? I should advise you not to presume upon your acquaintance with these ladies to do anything of the kind. I was in Paris two years ago, but I can swear that I never met you there!"

"Ephraim, explain thyself," said Aunt Rachael commandingly, "what hast thou against my nephew?"

"Simply this," replied Ephraim, tersely. "When I was staying in Paris, with the invalid gentleman who had engaged me as his medical attendant, Mr. Curzon put up at the same hotel. I was in the habit of meeting him every day at *table d'hôte*. It is impossible that he can have forgotten me. He had not been there long before he was challenged by a gentleman to whose wife he had made advances, dishonourable advances. They fought, and the French gentleman was severely wounded. Soon after this Mr. Curzon was wanted by the French police on a charge of circulating forged bank-notes. He decamped hastily without paying his hotel-bill, and from that day until now I have never seen him. That he should prove to be your nephew fills me with regret. Nevertheless, the truth must be told, if only to rid you of such an objectionable character. I—"

"You miserable liar!" flashed Val Curzon, beside himself with fury. "Do you mean to affirm that I and the swindler you mentioned just now are one and the same?"

"Certainly," said Ephraim, standing his ground. "If I were not positive as to your identity I should hesitate to bring such a serious charge against you. I recognised you directly you entered the room. Perhaps it will be as well for you at once to leave it, while the opportunity is yours."

This was too much, even for Val Curzon. The words had scarcely left Ephraim's mouth ere he found himself at the other end of the room without the trouble of walking there.

"Aunt Rachael, Ruth, it is an infamous falsehood!" Val cried hotly. "This fellow accuses me of being a libertine, a swindler. He pretends to recognise me, whereas I have never seen him until to-day. Am I to take such things calmly?"

"It was not necessary to knock thine accuser down, nephew," said Aunt Rachael, rebukingly. "Far better to refute the accusation, if, indeed, thou art able to do so."

"Of course I am. None the less he shall be made to suffer for the insult intended. Which hotel do you allude to?" demanded Val of the Quaker, who had picked himself up again, but, true to his tenets, refrained from returning the blow.

"The Hotel d'Angleterre."

"And I always stay at the Hotel de Paris," said Val, beginning to cool down and regret his violence. "It is a case of mistaken identity. I have never stayed at any other hotel in Paris."

"We can ascertain that by writing to the respective proprietors," said Ephraim, doggedly. "I will admit no mistake. Voice, features, all are the same. You cannot deceive me, Mr. Curzon."

"Aunt Rachael, you must decide between this man's story and mine," said Val, turning to the bewildered, distressed old lady. "It is my word against his at present. Will you allow your nephew to be unjustly branded as a libertine, a swindler, without any proof save the assertion of a fellow who, for aught I know, may be raving mad?"

"What can I say, what am I to think?" asked Aunt Rachael, sorrowfully. "You admit having been in Paris at the time, and Ephraim Barclay never told a lie in his life. Oh, Valentine! dear as you are to me, you must refrain from coming here until you have succeeded in refuting a charge so serious. If you have been led into evil ways—"

"Aunt Rachael, how can you doubt him?"

cried an indignant young voice. "Valentine is incapable of the conduct imputed to him by Ephraim Barclay. There is a dreadful mistake somewhere, and till it is cleared up, at least, can trust him implicitly. I know he is innocent."

As Ruth spoke, with glowing cheeks and bright eyes, half afraid of her own vehemence, yet determined to defend her lover, Val Curzon drew her towards him and kissed her before them all.

"Thank you, darling!" he said gently. "So long as you trust and believe in me the rest matters little."

"Ruth! Valentine!" exclaimed Aunt Rachael, while Ephraim Barclay made a forward movement as if to separate the lovers.

"Aunt Rachael, yesterday Ruth promised to be my wife!" explained Val, quietly. "It was my intention to ask your consent to our engagement in proper form. I hope when I have proved the unfounded nature of this gentleman's story that you will not refuse to give her to me."

"It is impossible," said Aunt Rachael, sternly. "I have promised Ruth to Ephraim Barclay. They are to be married three months' hence."

"I cannot marry Ephraim Barclay, aunt," replied Ruth gently, but firmly. "I care nothing for him, therefore I should wrong him were I to become his wife. I do not wish to disobey you, but in this matter I must decide for myself. Valentine loves me and—and his love is returned!"

"You are a foolish, disobedient girl," said Aunt Rachael, recovering from her surprise. "You are not old enough yet to decide what is best for yourself. Nephew Valentine, pray leave us!"

"Remember, Ruth, I hold you to your promise, to remain faithful to me till I am free to claim you!" were Val's parting words as he left the drawing-room in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

(To be continued.)

AN ENTERPRISING ARCHITECT.—Adjoining one end of the royal palace of Naples, which is the future home of the Crown Prince, is the theatre of San Carlo, which has an interesting story. When Charles III. was the King of Naples, he issued orders for the most magnificent theatre of Europe to be built in the shortest time possible. Angelo Caracciolo, a Neapolitan Architect, offered to complete it in three months, and by great effort and energy, actually did so. On the opening night the king sent for the architect to come to the royal balcony, and there publicly commended his work, adding that only one thing was lacking, and that was a private door and staircase, leading from the palace into the theatre for the use of the royal family. The architect bowed low, and retired that the play might begin. When the play was finished, the architect appeared before the king, saying—"Your Majesty's wish is accomplished, and preceded the astonished monarch to a private entrance in one end of the theatre. In the three hours that the acting had engaged the king's attention, the untiring architect had collected his workmen, and by almost superhuman effort had completed his task. He had torn down partitions and laid huge logs of wood for a stairway; but elegant velvet carpets and beautiful curtains concealed the rough floors and defaced walls, while a skilful arrangement of handsome mirrors and chandeliers produced a magical effect, and made the whole seem the work of fairy hands. Afterwards, the entrance was properly finished and last summer, says a writer, I walked from the palace through this private door, and stood in the royal balcony where the king had received the architect nearly one hundred and fifty years before.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE day following his arrival, Captain Eliot drove over to Danesford in a dog-cart, immediately after luncheon. A pretty pony-carriage and pair of cream-coloured ponies, decked with bells, was standing at the door, and two servants in livery were waiting on the steps.

"Could he see Miss Darvall?" he inquired. "Miss Darvall was just going out," rejoined the butler.

"Still I think she will see me!" said Captain Eliot, sending in his card and alighting with confidence.

After a very long delay, the answer came "that Miss Darvall was not feeling very well, and could not receive Captain Eliot, but that Mrs. Darvall was at home; the ponies were to be taken back to the stables."

"This excuse shall not serve her!" he said to himself, fiercely. "She thinks she is dealing with Mary. Can you let me have a sheet of paper and a pencil?" he asked of the clerical-looking butler. "My errand, to-day, is of the greatest importance."

The required paper and pencil was speedily forthcoming, and, in two minutes the following little note had been dashed off, twisted up, addressed, and despatched to Miss Darvall, who, still wearing her hat, was peeping from behind the blind upstairs, in hopes of seeing her unwelcome visitor drive away!

No doubt he had come to say something disagreeable. She really must get round Mary before she met Captain Eliot.

As she stood revolving various plans for her own comfort, the note he had just written was respectfully handed to her. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR Mrs. Campbell,—Can you not spare me a few minutes' conversation? If it is quite impossible I must address myself to your father instead.—Yours faithfully,

"M. ELIOT."

"Mrs. Campbell! indeed! Oh, show him up!" turning to her maid. "Send him into the little drawing-room; say I will be down at once, and go and bring me up here a decanter of sherry, and a wine-glass. I must brace up my courage for a good scene, I fancy," she said to herself, as she removed her hat and gloves and smoothed her hair, and looked at herself in the glass.

As her visitor waited below Mr. Darvall passed through the hall, and, after staring at him for a moment with a heavy look of dim recognition, came forward and said,—

"Captain Eliot! When did you come down? Very pleased to see you. The ladies are all at home. Won't you walk into my den, and pay me a visit first? Burns is away, and I'm a bit dull."

Max removed his hat, and followed the slouching figure of his host into a small room off the hall that smelt like a low public-house, so strong was the aroma of rum and brandy and rank tobacco.

It had originally been old Mr. Darvall's writing-room, and opened off the library, though it was usually entered, as now, from the hall.

And what a change had come over its appearance! Old proof before letters' prints had been removed, and cheap racing and yachting pictures covered the walls, as well as portraits of "pets" of the ring and the ballet. A forest of pipes bristled on the chimney-piece, the *Shipping News*, *Police News*, *Sporting Gazette*, &c., littered the table and floor; several orange telegraph envelopes lay scattered, and a spirit-case stood in a prominent position in the centre of the table, the bottles at low ebb.

"Have a nip?" said Mr. Darvall, hospitably, laying his hand on a bottle as he spoke.

"No thank you; I never touch spirits in the daytime."

"Oh! Well, wait till you are my age, and

you will see that you can't get along comfortably without your tot in the morning," pouring out half a tumbler of brandy with a shaky hand, and filling it partially with water. "Here's your health," tossing off the half of it, to show he did not prescribe for others what he did not take himself. "Have you come down to stop?"

"No; not for more than a few days. I came down on business!"

"Oh, business. Was it that brought you here to-day?"

"Yes; I particularly wish to see Miss Darvall!"

"Oh! is that what you are after? Well, I've nothing to say against it. You are as likely a match as she could get, and Julia is getting on, and she is not an heiress now, as you know. That girl of Godfrey Darvall's turning up at our own gate played the deuce!"

"Do you mean me to understand that you think I am a suitor for Miss Darvall's hand?" inquired Max, gravely.

"Understand!" with a wink. "To be sure, and you are welcome to her, my boy! She and Mrs. D— don't hit it off, and she is a bit extravagant. However, you can stand that; you are a rich man!"

"I am not aspiring to Miss Darvall—allow me to correct that mistake at once!"

"Not!" finishing the tumbler; "sorry to hear that!"

"I am married to the other Miss Darvall."

"Eh! Nonsense, you are joking. We have never heard a word about it!"

"No; not as yet; but now everyone will know it!"

"And you will be turning us out?" frowning heavily.

"No; certainly not, as far as I am concerned; but I shall take my wife's affairs into my own hands, and put everything on a square footing. The—the making over of the property and funds was conducted in a rather slipshod fashion. Was it not, Mr. Darvall?"

"Do you mean," he stammered, "to come down on me for arrears for three years' rents?"

"Oh, no; but I shall require a little information respecting a sum of twenty thousand pounds that was in the funds, and that has never been accounted for!"

Mr. Darvall's hand shook as if he had the palsy, and he filled himself out another bumper, which seemed to give him confidence, though his crimson face had a faded, ashen look as he said,—

"That will be all right, old man—right as a trivet. By the way, do you ever do anything on the turf?" taking up a couple of telegrams, and smoothing them out.

"Very little. I've ridden a few races—regimental—that's all; but I never had more than a fiver on my mount!"

"But you don't bet?"

"No! I did once, and burnt my fingers badly!"

"I bet! There's nothing like it. Nothing to beat the excitement. I won a good bit, but lately I've dropped a pile. However, I'm going to be a man or a mouse to-day—the Goodwood Cup, you know. I stand to win a pot of money on 'Tam-o'-Shanter!'"

"He is the favourite, isn't he, and at short odds now?"

"Yes; but I backed him a month ago, and I have not hedged a farthing. I'll know my fate by three o'clock. It makes one restless, this sort of thing hanging in the balance."

"What?"

"Well, if he wins I clear forty-five thousand. I'm made for life. I've not been able to settle to anything to-day!"

"If he loses?"

"If he does! He could not—not at the weights! Besides, I got the direct 'tip!' If such a thing did happen!"—his eyes roving restlessly round the room—"I'm done!"

"Miss Darvall is waiting for you in the blue drawing-room, sir!" said a footman at the door.

"All right, I'm coming. Well, good-bye, Mr. Darvall!" rising. "I hope, for your sake,

that 'Tam o' Shanter' will be first past the judge to-day. Forty-five thousand pounds is a fortune. I shall probably see you before I leave for town!"

"Yes; I'll call over. We must talk about money matters. You won't press me about that little sum you spoke of, eh! You'll give me time. I'm rather short just now."

"Oh, yes! I never press anyone, but you will understand that some day—of course, at your convenience—our family lawyers will manage the matter. That fellow in Caversham of Mary's is no use at all!" So saying, with a nod he quitted the room, and following the servant presented himself before Julia.

Julia, wound up by a glass of sherry, was sitting in an arm-chair looking like a thunder-cloud. Instead of saying, "How do you do?" or any little civility of that kind, she burst out the moment the door closed,—

"Well, what is it? What do you want? What brings you —"

"This," producing her own letter. "This brought me."

"Show it to me!" stretching out her large white hand. "Yes," examining it. "Well?"

"I came down expressly to see you," now taking a seat. "Talking is more explicit than writing. Writing one sometimes says more than one intended."

"So they do!" fiercely tearing the letter across and across, and then into tiny little scraps, which she flung upon the carpet with passionate force.

"Why do you do that?"

"To give you a lesson. Now you have no proofs!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you can prove nothing against me. If I chose to say that child is Mary's, who can contradict me?" facing him with an air of bold defiance.

"And do you mean to disown the child?"

"Certainly I do. I hate it. I was mad to have married Hector, to return to my former level; and as to going out to him and living up in the bush as a stockman's wife, never seeing a soul for months but blacks—mutton, mutton, mutton to eat, and tea and damper! Ugh," throwing up her hands, "I think I see myself!"

"Who is to claim the child and pay for its keep?"

"Why, Mary! Who else?"

"I would not have believed that such ingrained selfishness and ingratitude existed," he said, looking at her angrily. "You are lower than the beasts; they have maternal instincts."

"Call me beast, or what you like! I don't care. Hard word break no bones. Mary is my cousin; she is literally rolling in riches. She owes me plenty, for I was a kind friend to her when she was nothing but a common girl. I picked her up from the gate, and made her my maid and companion. If you and she think to fix that child on me, and to bully me into acknowledging it, you are vastly mistaken."

"You used to be a good-natured, frank young woman, with some ideas of honour and some sense of right," exclaimed Max, rising, and looking at her. "What has changed you? You are scarcely humane."

"Money! It has changed me, it has changed Jack Burn, it has changed father. In a moment of folly I thought I would go back to my old life and my old lover. I went. I'll stick to Danesford and England, and money and luxury."

"And make your cousin Mary suffer for your sins? Make her pay your debts—support your forsaken child—sacrifice her good name and reputation to screen a worthless woman like you? Never, whilst I can stand by her."

"Oh! So you have made it up!" she said with a sneer.

"Words are of no use with you, Mrs. Campbell."

"I'm not Mrs. Campbell. Prove it before you call me that."

"Words are no use, they break no bones."

"I'll give you a taste of deeds instead. In the first place, Mrs. Gibson, the gardener's wife, is referred to you for the future. Mary shall not interfere again with you or your affairs. She has had enough of them! I have written to Mrs. Gibson to that effect. As you won't acknowledge the child, the woman in Folkestone where you lodged will come forward and testify to your identity as its mother. This when you are summoned by law for the support of your offspring. So you will have to make a virtue of necessity. Mary will no longer make any payments for you in any shape or form. You shall depend on your own resources for the future."

"Wretch!" cried Julia, springing to her feet. "Begone, and do your worst. No one will believe you. You will never find the woman, clever as you think yourself. Go! I desire you to leave this house this instant, and never to show your face inside the doors again."

"Nonsense! You are mad," he returned, calmly. "You forget that this is my wife's house—that everything in it is hers; that your father's income, and the very bread you eat, comes from her liberality. If she resembled you in disposition, she would use her power and thrust you out of doors."

At this moment a report of two shots was heard downstairs. Julia turned pale to the very lips. Perhaps, nay, probably the thought that flashed through Max Eliot's mind also flashed through hers.

"Stay here," he said. "I shall go and see what has happened. Don't be alarmed. Some one cleaning guns, and firing caps, no doubt!"

"It was in the room underneath this," she answered, between her teeth. "Raper's room. I will go too. He has a revolver. He—"

"You will stay here!" said her opponent, firmly. "I implore you for your own sake—"

At this moment the door opened, and a terrified looking man-servant appeared. He would not speak before Julia, but he signalled Max, who followed him at once into the corridor, closing the door behind him.

"It's all along of these races," began the man.

"What?" inquired Captain Eliot.

"Mr. Darvall has shot himself. He is lying dead in the little room below."

Already a crowd had assembled in the hall, and Max found himself taking the management of the whole household. One man he despatched for a doctor, another for a magistrate. The housekeeper he sent to look after Mrs. and Miss Darvall, and, above all, to keep them upstairs, and then he entered the room he had quitted about three-quarters of an hour previously.

The smoke of the recent shots still hung in the air. On the ground lay Mr. Darvall, with a handkerchief over his face, to conceal the horrid sight. He had blown his brains out. Beside him lay a telegram, on which was written,—

"Goodwood, 2.30. Retribution, Camilla, Busybody. Tam-o'-Shanter nowhere."

So he had lost the forty thousand pounds, and this was his alternative—death!

Jack Burn, who had only just heard the news, now rushed into the room—almost speechless. As he looked down on his dead shipmate, and felt his pulse, which had stopped for ever, he burst into a storm of sobs.

"And this, Ben," he cried, amid his paroxysms of grief, "is all the great fortune has brought you to. We might have expected no better. And—there's a fate in these things, say what they will. You staked your all on one big venture, and the horse that reined you in—Retribution! Aye!—aye! and it's all Retribution!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THAT evening Mary Darvall received a telegram saying,—

"Come to Daneford. Mr. Darvall is dead!"

This was not from her husband, but from her old friend Humpy, who, taking advantage of her absence from Folkestone, had paid a flying visit to his former haunts at Caversham; and, not knowing of any disagreement between the two cousins, much less of the baby, had sent off the above without an hour's delay.

Mary showed the message to Mrs. Seymour (who warmly approved of her going), put on a black dress, had a bag packed with a few toilet necessities, and started off at once with her maid.

Julia received her cousin sullenly enough, but said she was glad she had come; she could see after her mourning for one thing, and keep Captain Eliot from tormenting her for another. He was here yesterday, when it happened, and he nearly drove her mad.

To be instantly delivered from Captain Eliot's persecution, to have her mourning made becomingly, was more on Miss Julia's mind than grief for her father, now that the first burst of horror was over.

As to Mrs. Darvall, she sat rigidly aloof—tearless, and indignant that Providence should have need her so badly.

As the days went on she might have been noticed secretly stowing away old lace, plate, and jewellery, in very considerable quantities—plate, lace, and jewellery that were heirlooms in the Darvall family. She was evidently what is called "feathering her nest" to some purpose.

"Of course, now that your father is gone, Julia," said Mary, one morning, "and you have nothing to fear from anyone, you will go out to Hector, and take the baby with you, will you not?"

"I am very sorry I ever married him!" she answered, fiercely. "I was out of my mind when I did it. If I could undo it I would. And to think of the matches I could have made!" casting up her eyes and emitting a long, regretful sigh.

"I thought you were fond of Hector, and that you married him entirely for love, and that no one could compare to him in any way—looks least of all? So you used to tell me in London!"

"He is well enough, but he is rough and common, and uses such vulgar words, and smokes horrid tobacco, and wears coloured flannel shirts, and calls me 'lass!' He really is not much above one of the grooms; and he has only enough to keep himself! I was crazy when I met him, and married him!"

"You could have thought of all that before. I thought you told me you were saving money out of your allowance?"

"So I was at first; but I gave it up! I never!—never!—never could go out and rough it in the bush! I cannot do without my early morning cup of tea, my maid to dress me, nice clothes, a pretty carriage, and all those kind of little things that go to make life easy and pleasant!" returned Julia, coolly.

"Little things! You don't call them little things, when you weigh them against and value them more than your husband, child?" cried her companion, indignantly.

"The fact is, Mary, I was not married to Hector a week before I was sick of him!" replied Julia, in a sulky tone.

"Oh, Julia! for shame! He is your husband!"

"Well, you need not preach. A nice way you have always behaved to yours! You treated him no better than a dog, and serves him right. I don't like him. I can't bear him! I hate him, with his cool airs of command!"

"And what are your plans, Julia?" turning to another topic. "I suppose you have made some?"

"Plans! I don't know. I certainly won't live with Mrs. Darvall. I'll come on a visit to you for a while—if you like!" she added, carelessly.

"I don't see how that can be, when you detest Max. He dislikes you; and, besides—"

"Besides what?" lifting her eyebrows.

"We are going abroad this autumn. He intends to leave the service, and to live at Carnegort for the future."

"And you are going to live at Carnegort?"

"Yes, I believe so," she answered, with an increase of colour.

"Well, I shall stay on here for a while; but I won't have Mrs. Darvall in the house—that's certain! She was not a bit sorry for poor papa, though, poor dear, he was greatly changed latterly. Jack Burn said he wanted us in the library at five o'clock—he has something to say. Maybe it's about a will. I suppose he left a will?"

"Well, as it's five o'clock now, we had better go and see what he wants. I know Max has been up to his ears in papers for the last three days. I never got a word with him," she added, rather aggrievedly.

"What has he found?" out said Julia, as they swept downstairs together.

"That, I am sorry to say, your father has left his affairs in a fearful state—debts in every direction. Even the servants' wages are a year in arrears—the wine, corn bills, butcher, baker—all unpaid!"

"Oh! a tribe of locusts, who have made fortunes out of us the last three years," returned Julia, scornfully.

"I shall, of course, settle these," said Mary, "or Max will, and the servants and other employés, as your father was my cousin; but his racing and gambling debts are out of my power to pay off, even if Max would let me."

"Of course, Max is everything now!" exclaimed Julia, with a sneer.

"Of course. The debts amount to seventy thousand pounds."

"Oh!" shrugging her shoulders, "I daresay they are all thieves and sharpers."

Mr. Darvall, Captain Eliot, Jack Burn, and Mr. Montagu were already assembled when the two ladies entered the library.

Jack Burn looked very restless and miserable, and kept sitting down and rising up in quite a distracting fashion.

At last he, as he would have called it himself, "came to an anchor," and flung himself into a chair, and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"I've got something to say," he began, huskily, "something I must say, and I don't know how to say it, or where to begin. Perhaps it would be as well to start with the worst at once, and to tell you that the man that was buried yesterday in the Daneford vault was—was no more a Darvall than I was!"

Sensation!

"He was just Benjamin Daniel, of the coasting steamer *Jane Bacon*—no more and no less!"

"And how —?" began Max Eliot.

"Oh, yes! I'm coming to that all in good time. You shall hear how; but I must reel it off all in my own way. However, I'm bound to clear my conscience of a load that has lain heavy on it for a matter of four years. Miss Julia there is Julia Darvall only by a fraud. She is Ju Daniel, a milliner's girl. Mrs. Darvall was married under a false name, and so she is Mrs. Martin still; and serves you right, ma'am," nodding towards her. "He caught you reading some papers one night on the sly. He thought they told a tale, and asked you to marry him to stop your mouth. They were not what he feared, after all, so he just saddled himself with an old wife for nothing. However, that's not so much to the point at present."

To judge by the sallow face of the lady in question, it was very much to the point indeed. She gasped, half rose, sat down, and then screamed out,—

"I don't believe a word of it—it's all lies!"

"Ben and me was mates," continued the speaker, "as you knows, don't you, Ju?" to Julia, who was staring at him with a fixed white face. "He lived, when he was ashore, in one of the little back streets of Melbourne, and sent Ju to school, and gave her a trade."

Aye, those were good times—far better than these last four years, though we did not think so when we started for Europe with thousands at our back and the world before us!

"But we were happy in those days, when Ben and I came back from sea, and had a small 'burst' on shore, and took you to the theatres and music-halls, Ju, and had a 'snack' of cold meat, or tripe and onions to follow up at home.

"However, here I am, 'tacking' again. I'll bring to in earnest this time. One trip—the last as it happened—we had uncommonly dirty weather. One particular afternoon we saw to eastward a large schooner-rigged steamer; she had a black funnel and a hull; she had a heavy list to port; and when we got within half-a-mile of her we saw that she was abandoned—to all appearances not a soul to be seen on deck. As the sea was not running very high we launched a boat, and boarded her. She was half under water, and sinking gradually.

"However, the saloon was all right still, but empty. There were a row of cabins at each side—two or six, I think—and we peered into one or two of them, thinking we might come across money, or watches, or such like portable goods.

"And as we were coming away—empty-handed, for there was nothing but bedding and clothes and boots, and sea-chests and such-like—we heard a kind of wailing cry come from a cabin aft. We walked straight down to where the squeal came from; and there, in a bunk in the end cabin, we found a woman, a young woman, with a child in her arms—a live child about eighteen months old.

"She was partly insensible, but we brought her to with clapping her hands and pouring spirits down between her teeth. It soon revived her, and she opened her eyes and looked at us and spoke.

"She said there had been a desperate storm; half the crew had been swept overboard. Two boats' full had been launched and filled with passengers, and swamped before her eyes.

"She had not had the courage to jump into another boat that was putting off, and had elected to stay behind and go down with the steamer.

"It was the *Mangalore* from Auckland, New Zealand, bound for London. She—the woman I mean—had been without food for three days. It was three days since the storm, and yet the steamer was afloat (this thanks to her watertight compartments).

"She had had nothing to eat or drink; the few biscuits she had found she had given to the child. Her health was bad always; she only wanted to live to reach London, and to see her boy put in possession of his fortune.

"No use to move her," she said—all her talk was very low and breathless—but if you two good men will take charge of my boy you will have your reward, as you deal with him, as sure as a dying woman speaks to you. My husband is dead, and he will soon be an orphan, and has no friends. My husband has lived a poor, rough kind of life in New Zealand. Though he knew he was of good family at home, it did him no good out here—he was born in the colony. One day, about three months ago, he heard by chance that he was heir to the fortune and Place in England—Daneford. His name was Darvall, the boy is John Darvall. Now it's all his, for a fever carried off my husband just as luck had turned for him at last, and his last words to me were, "Susan, take the boy home, bring him up a gentleman. We have all the papers about births and marriages, and everything to prove the case," and she handed out a big bundle sown up in oil silk that was under her pillow. 'I trust it to you,' she said, giving it to Ben.

"See that my boy has his rights; be good to him; and may the blessing of a dying woman—'With that her head fell back; she gave one lonely sigh, and she was dead!"

"Yes, she was as dead as a door-nail. Well, we had no time to lose, for the steamer was sinking under us every roll she gave; so I

took the child out of his dead mother's arms, rolled him up in a blanket, picked up one or two of his bits of clothes that lay about on the floor, and stuffed them in my pocket, and made for the deck.

"There was no good bringing the dead mother with us—the ship was her rightful coffin, and she and it would go down together soon. Well, I handed the child, whimpering with cold and hunger, into the boat, and we shoved off for our own craft, that lay about half-a-mile to leeward.

"There was a good deal of staring and whispering among the men when they saw a baby handed over the side. However, everyone bustled about; one warmed up some tinned Swiss milk, another got ready a hot bath, and among us we turned to and washed and fed and dressed the little chap. He was ravenous, and quite exhausted and weak with hunger and crying.

"Well, for a week or two he thrived most marvellously, considering he had no nurses but rough sailors; but after that he just pined away, and one night he seemingly died in his sleep, and there was an end of him! We had done our best, that I will say.

"After we had buried him, we began to turn our thoughts to the parcel of papers; and one evening, after eight bells, Ben and I got out the packet and opened it, and read them over.

"There, fair enough was Darvall's marriage, that had come out to Australia—Fred was his name—then his son's birth and marriage. Oh, it was all square; and there were several letters from a lawyer, talking of rents and money in funds, and accumulations, and interest, and land, and jewels that fairly made our mouths water.

"And it seemed that for fifteen years the Place had been empty and unclaimed; that it was going begging for an owner; that this Darvall, whose wife and son we had seen die, was the very last of all his race, and how the lands, and place, and money must go to the Crown!

"The subject had a kind of craze for us. Every evening we would take a read at the papers, and every morning we would talk them over as we walked the deck. At last Ben spoke what was in both of our minds.

"Why should not we reach out our hands and take the fortune; we would be harming no one. It was only a drop in the ocean to the Crown!"

"Well, the end of it was, we talked and talked, and tempted each other into it; and once we decided to lay hands on the spoil we had plenty of time to arrange our plans. Ben was to be 'boss,' though I once was a gentleman—aye, you'll scarcely believe it. Work, and rough life, and rough living knocked the polish off what was always a rough diamond. We were to tell the same tale, and hang together, and were to go halves.

"Well, we had it all out and dry, and the whole scheme worked so smoothly, that 'pon my word at times I began to believe in ourselves.

"We succeeded without one single drawback. Came home, learnt our parts, and were doing splendidly, till, from sheer idleness and a lazy land life, Ben fell to gambling and betting, and drink. He spent all his own share and mine too, and many a row we had. It was no use, and I could not desert him, even if I would; I had no money.

"When it turned out that there was an owner for Daneford, after all, I wanted to make a clean breast, but he would not let me. He said he had a big sum short he must make good first; and then, if he could lay hands on twenty thousand pounds, and marry Julia off to some swell with money, he and I would just ship back to Melbourne.

"There, ladies and gentlemen, you have the whole story," he concluded, rather suddenly.

"You have forgotten one item," put in Humpty. "You have not mentioned the visit that you paid to Mr. Darvall's writing-room

one night, and the papers you carried away by stealth!"

"How do you know?" wheeling round on him.

"I saw you! You dropped a paper, which I found and put back. It was an old lease; but what were the papers you carried away?"

"Wills, marriages, certificates, copies of title deeds we wanted; but we came with our lawyer's consent and knowledge. We entered by an old door leading from the garden—our presence was required in our own interests.

We dare not trust a single strand of our coil of a plot into a stranger's hand. Now I've said my say, and I'm going back to the colony to start afresh in my own line—the sea. I've had enough of land and false grandeur. 'Ju' Darvall, if you are wise you will come along too. With all your airs and fine clothes you never were the real article. Strange how you and Miss Darvall change places! She, once the girl at the gate, is the mistress; and you, once the mistress, are naught by rights, but a milliner's apprentice!"

"I don't believe a single word you say—it's all lies!—all one of your old sea yarns!" cried Julia, furiously. "You are drunk!" she added, glaring at him like some wild animal.

"I can prove all I say—from the finding of the *Mangalore* down to to-day."

"I believe you, for one," put in Humpty. "I was certain from the first that you were a whole gang of impostors; but I could not prove it, and your having those documents from Australia was a fact there was no getting over, and that puzzled me uncommonly."

"Of course, if it's true we must leave!" said Mrs. Martin, with a grim face. "I speak for myself. I have been deluded and defrauded worse than anyone! Hanging would be too good for you," to Burn; and Darvall.

"Well, he is dead, and you may let him alone!" turning on her savagely. "At any rate, you have made a purse the last three years."

"And I suppose Miss Darvall, late of the lodge, will come and live here now?" continued Mrs. Martin, in an evil voice.

"Perhaps I may," she replied. "It would seem rather odd if I did not occasionally occupy my own house; and Mrs. Martin, I do not wish to be disagreeable, but I understand that you have packed up all the Mechin lace that belonged to my grandmother, and is said to be priceless; also the diamond buckles, necklet, and stomacher—not to mention the service of Queen Ann silver. You must see yourself that you have no claim to any of these articles."

For a moment Mrs. Martin strove to speak, and strove in vain. At last she gasped out,—"That wretch White is a spy in your pay!"

"She is not a spy—neither is she in my pay. She is simply an honest woman! You are welcome to stay here for a week to make your arrangements. Mr. Montagu will be here. As for you, Julia, I think Captain Burn has made an excellent suggestion. I think you cannot do better than accompany him back to Australia. You—"

"I don't intend to be ordered about the world at the bidding of a young woman who was once my maid. I shall manage my own affairs, and no thanks to you!" cried Julia, passionately.

"No doubt! I have often managed your affairs without thanks! I don't expect them, but I shall now wash my hands of your affairs. Captain Burn, when you hear that Julia Daniel is privately married to a man called Hector Campbell, now in Australia, you will see even more powerful reasons for her accompanying you than before. She has a child born in Folkestone, boarding with my gardener's wife!"

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Martin.

"Yes, I've telegraphed to his nurse. She is bringing him here to-day. If Mrs. Campbell and her son return with you to Australia, I shall allow her an income of three hundred



["AND THIS," SAID JACK BURN, "IS ALL THE GREAT FORTUNE HAS BROUGHT YOU TO!"]

a year. She has acquired tastes in England that totally unfit her for station life, and to despatch her penniless would be cruel alike to her and her husband. Julia, I am not your cousin. You have no claim whatever upon me, but I wish you well. Shake off your sloth and selfishness, and make a fresh start. Your passage and outfit shall be provided for you, and your proper home, you know, is with your husband."

"How fine it is to hear you talk!" cried Julia, doubly soured by these repeated shocks of misfortune. "Has your home been with yours, I should like to know, and you are married years?"

"No; but it will be for the future. From to-day, I," looking towards Max, and placing her hand in his, "am going to do what I advise you to do. I am going to turn over a new leaf. I am going with him now—never, I hope, to part from him again!"

About ten days later Captain and Mrs. Eliot, who were at Lucerne, received a telegram at breakfast that startled them a good deal. It was from H. Montagu, and said,—

"Daneford was burnt to the ground last night. Plate, jewels, and papers saved. Particulars by post."

The particulars stated that the fire broke out on the afternoon of Mrs. Darvall's departure, and presumably in her room, but the flames spread so rapidly that this was mere suspicion.

Still, it was strange, that although she drove away to Caversham, with all her luggage on a fly, en route for London, some two hours later, a milkmaid running to see the conflagration had passed Mrs. Martin standing on a hill, above the place, alone, evidently calmly contemplating the fire with the keenest interest.

Had she come back to look at her own handiwork? No one knows. Nothing was brought home to her. She invested a substantial cheque (which Mary commissioned

her agent to send her) in the goodwill and furniture of a lodging-house, and has fallen back into her old ways.

Now and then she bursts out in tales of her former magnificence and state, and poses to her circle as a cruelly ill-used woman. She talks mysteriously and venomously of "enemies," and has no word in her vocabulary sufficiently black to convey her opinion of Mrs. Maxwell Eliot!

Julia, her child, and Jack Burn have sailed across the seas, and whether it is that her native colonial air has wrought a change in her for the better, or what other causes have been at work I cannot say, but not long ago she dispatched a penitent and grateful letter to her erstwhile maid, cousin, and friend.

Gratitude has been linked with an appreciation of favours to come. In this case there was a petition in the postscript, which ran as follows:—

"P.S.—Dearest Mary, will you, for old times sake, increase my little pittance. You will not feel it. You are so rich, and it will be a boon to me. Things are twice as dear here as they are in England, and I have not a decent gown to my back!"

"I am not very sorry for Daneford, after all," said Daneford's mistress, as she walked about the charred ruins escorted by her husband and Humpty, who leant on a stick (who was a constant guest at Daneford).

"Not sorry?" he exclaimed, indignantly.

"It was a queer, uncanny place of late years—ever since that horrible story about Madame. That skeleton that was found when the wall fell down—the wall next the blue dressing-room—was her husband's, of course, that she murdered, and the body never could be found."

"Very likely. We had it buried quietly in the family vault," said Humpty. "No need for it to get into the papers."

"And now, although we have lost a great many valuable paintings, that horrible picture that always foretold a death has been burnt.

So has that haunted door, and we never could have got rid of them if the house had not been burnt. Don't you see that?"

"It will have to be rebuilt some day—luckily the out-offices escaped. I see Maxwell going over them now."

"Why should it be built when one house does Max and I, and I much prefer Carn-gort!"

"I daresay you do; but supposing you have children, Carn-gort goes to your eldest son—Daneford to the next. What would be the use of such a splendid property if he had not a roof to cover his head? Where could he live?"

"Hush!" she cried, blushing as she spoke. "You are talking nonsense. Such people—such a person may never exist."

"But supposing he did. Where is he to live, I say?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered, with a laugh. "Why, not in the Gate lodge, where I spent no less than twenty years!"

[THE END.]

HOME-MAKING.—To become a successful home-maker, a girl must have some care put upon her shoulders. She must be taught to consider other people as well as herself, and learn to provide for their comfort. Teach her that character is higher than intellect, and that by practising a little self-denial once in a while she will not only make others happy, but will increase her own happiness, and will become less selfish. Teach her to work. Let me not be understood as being opposed to the teaching of the so-called higher accomplishments. I am not opposed to them, but do not think they should be taught to the detriment of the more useful ones. Make a companion of your daughter. Teach her to entertain, as well as to be entertained. In this way she will be made to think that she is really of some importance in the household.



["SPEAK," OLIVE CRIED. "YOUR SILENCE FRIGHTENS ME. BLAME ME IF YOU WILL, BUT DO NOT HATE ME UTTERLY."]

NOVELLETTE.]

FROM DEPTHS OF DESPAIR.

—X—

CHAPTER I.

"SHALL I get you a cup of tea? You are looking terribly fagged."

At the sound of the rich, musical voice one or two ladies glanced up curiously, and then whispered amongst themselves. The speaker herself seemed wholly indifferent to their regard, as she bent her dark eyes full upon the slim, recumbent figure of a young girl whose infantile loveliness had attracted her.

The fair, fatigued face was turned towards her, half entreatingly. "Oh, if you only would! But I am ashamed to trouble you; and yet a cup of tea would be so acceptable! I have tried to get one at two or three stations where we stayed, but the noise and confusion at the refreshment-rooms frightened me."

The stranger smiled, and her glorious dark eyes took in every detail of the other's dress and figure with kindly interest. "Let me place this shawl under your head," she said; and having done so, she hastened to procure the much-desired tea. No sooner had she left the waiting-room than one lady said to another, "Do you know her?"

"By sight and reputation. She is Miss Byron, the famous actress!"

"Really! Why! I thought Olive Byron a lovely woman!"

"Most people (men especially) consider her so; but the fact is, she is only interesting in appearance, partly because of her foreign eyes and complexion, partly because of the pensive air she cultivates. But however diverse opinions may be as to her beauty, her genius is acknowledged by all, and she has the *entrée* to the best society."

"Class distinctions are not so strictly regarded as they should be," answered the second

lady, severely. "What is Miss Byron's parentage?"

"No one knows. Old Byron, the comedy man at the Olympus, adopted and educated her, but he was always very secret about her antecedents; and since his death his sister has played duenna to the girl. Her character, you know, is irreproachable."

At this moment the subject of their conversation re-entered. The girl upon the couch opened her languid blue eyes, and lifted herself upon her elbow.

"How very good you are!" she said, smiling faintly as she took the tea from Miss Byron's hand. "I am at a loss to thank you as I should."

Again that wonderfully tender smile lit up and beautified the dark face.

"I require no thanks. See, I have brought you some sandwiches, but pray remember I don't recommend them. They are compounded of a maximum of chaffy bread and a minimum of ham, but I thought if you were hungry—"

"And I am," interrupted the other. "I left home at eight this morning, and it is now past two. I believe I could even eat one of those travesties on pork pies I saw at Clapham Junction. Oh! they had such bulwarks of crust, and looked as indigestible as iron!"

"I am not unacquainted with them," Miss Byron answered amusedly; "and experience (dearly bought) has taught me to avoid them. Are you going much further?"

"To South Kensington; there my aunt will meet me. This is the first time in my life that I have travelled alone, and I am proportionately stupid and frightened."

"I, too, am going to South Kensington. If you would prefer doing so, you can travel with me."

"I should like it. You seem so self-possessed and confident that I should feel secure with you. No—no more tea, thank you," giving back her empty cup. "You can't tell how refreshed I feel! Now, how long have we to wait?"

"About ten minutes. I will take these things back to the refreshment-room, and return to you at once. Is your luggage all right?"

"I'm sure I can't say," bewilderedly; "I never thought of looking."

"How is it addressed?"

"Miss Franklin, passenger from Sunnymead to South Kensington."

Miss Byron again disappeared, and did not return until the train rushed into the station, and the platform was crowded with people.

"Hurry," she said. "Your luggage is quite safe, and I have secured a compartment to ourselves."

Once seated, and revelling in the luxury of cushioned and elbowed seats, Miss Franklin removed her hat, and with small deft hands, smoothed the masses of puffy, yellow hair about her brow; then said, with childish curiosity in voice and manner, "How funny it is that you and I, who are complete strangers, should be travelling together in such a friendly fashion! I wonder if you would object to telling me your name?"

"Not at all. I am Olive Byron, and I live at Chester Lodge, Kensington. I assure you," half laughing, half in bitterness, "I am thoroughly respectable."

"Olive Byron!" mused the other. "The name is familiar to me, and yet I have never seen you before, and I think my friends are not yours. Oh!" flushing, "I know now why it is familiar to me; I drove with my uncle into Hilsey (a town five miles off Sunnymead) about three weeks ago, and all the photographers' windows were filled with portraits of a Miss Olive Byron, who is a celebrated actress. How annoyed you must be at such a coincidence!"

Her companion smiled with unmistakable bitterness; then, "I am sorry you share the old-world prejudice against folks of my profession. I am the 'celebrated actress' of whom you spoke."

Flossie Franklin flushed to the roots of her

pretty hair, and began to mutter some incoherent apologies, but Miss Byron stopped her by a swift, imperative gesture.

"It is quite needless to apologise. I have long since grown accustomed to such remarks as yours. But, as a matter of fact, let me say that the stage is no longer what once it was (and what prodigates and Christians alike combined to make it). For one woman in the profession who is not what she should be, you will find twenty good and virtuous. Royalty honours us, receives us, and no man in England is more esteemed than Irving, the apostle of the stage; and what man dare raise his voice in slander against the gifted, dainty, lovable Ellen Terry?"

Miss Byron paused, and the slow crimson surged over her face and throat, dyeing the clear pallor of her skin to a roseate hue; and Flossie, still confused and uncomfortable, hastened to say,—

"You must forgive me if I seemed rude and harsh. The fact is, I have been reared amongst Baptists; my uncle being the minister at Sunnymead, and he has always taught me to believe the stage unfit for any modest woman. I have never yet been inside a theatre!"

Flossie's apology was almost worse than the first mistake, but Olive smiled leniently; the girl's infantile beauty and utter helplessness had touched some tender chord in that great and tender heart. Despite her popularity, her successes, and her pride in her profession, she was a very lonely woman, and weighed down by a cruel secret. Men wondered why she so persistently refused to listen to their wooing, why she so resolutely set her face against matrimony; and of all her lovers, the most ardent and most noble was my Lord Lindsay, whose handsome face and person, whose eloquent tongue seemed to make no more impression upon her than the admiration of her lowest and meanest suitor did, or apparently so. She was thinking of Oscar Lindsay when Flossie spoke again,—

"Don't you sometimes wish your parents had allowed you to adopt some other profession?"

"No," said Miss Byron. "I am an orphan. My father I do not remember, my mother is a vague idea to me."

"I, too, am an orphan," Flossie answered, noticing the flush on Miss Byron's cheek; "and I have lived almost all my life with my uncle Franklin. Now I am to reside with my mother's relatives until I am twenty-one—three whole years," sighing; "and I am afraid they are very worldly people; but I am altogether helpless in the matter."

The pretty, selfish, shallow blonde was appealing strangely to the other's generous nature. She saw her little meannesses and affections, but was lenient to them, and in her heart wished she possessed Flossie's fair loveliness, totally ignoring the fact that time, which would rob her companion of her charm and colouring, would pass her by, because hers was the loveliness of heart and intelligence.

They had now reached South Kensington, and as Olive assisted Flossie to alight the latter looked round with an apprehensive air. She was half afraid her aristocratic aunt would recognise the popular actress, and be annoyed to find her in Miss Byron's society. As she hesitated whether to leave her, or to avail herself of her services, a handsome middle-aged lady, richly and fashionably dressed, advanced, and after a quick scrutiny of the trim little figure and pretty hair, said,—

"There is small need to ask your name. You are Flossie!" and as she spoke, Lady Desma put out a small delicately-gloved hand into which Flossie insinuated hers, looking nervously the while after Olive's figure as she moved down the platform in search of their luggage.

"I hope you will not be angry, auntie," she began, in her clear bell-like little voice, "but I have travelled the last part of the journey with Miss Olive Byron. She materially assisted me, and of course I can't hurry off

without saying good-bye; although had I known at the outset who and what she was, I should have refused any offer of help."

My lady's under-lip curved disdainfully, but although her thought was "little prig," she answered quietly,—

"My dear Flossie, you have much to unlearn. Your prejudices are those of the sixteenth century, and obtain only in such remote places as Sunnymead. Miss Byron is frequently my honoured guest, and nowadays a tragedienne takes the precedence of a Nonconformist minister's daughter;" and having administered this wholesome rebuke, she waited in silence until Olive's return.

"My dear Miss Byron!" with even more than her usual cordiality, "I am delighted to welcome you back, and seize this opportunity to thank you for services rendered to my niece."

Olive's face lit up pleasantly.

"I am glad to find my new friend is related to my oldest and truest. And now, Lady Desma, you must forgive me if I hurry off. There has been some mistake about my telegram, and my carriage is not here to meet me."

"I shall be most happy if you will spare mine," interrupted Lady Desma, but Miss Byron declined her offer, adding,—

"I am due at the Olympian in half an hour, so must drive there without delay."

"I shall hope to see you again at Mrs. Warnfield's garden party. Of course you are going?"

"I have received an invite; but am afraid other engagements will prevent my acceptance."

"I hope not; I have promised Lord Lindsay he shall see you there."

"That was rather rash," flushing slightly; and then, bowing, she hurried away, whilst Lady Desma and her niece entered the luxurious landau waiting them.

"Now, Flossie," said my lady, not unkindly, "you must remember it is not good form to abuse one's acquaintances, especially if one is indebted to them for kindnesses; remember, too, that although your mother's birth was good, your father was distinctly of the middle class, and that the former alienated the hearts of her friends by her megalomania. I give you this warning now, because any assumption on your part will cause folks to speak severely of your parentage." Then seeing her niece's blue eyes fill with tears, she added, "I don't wish to hurt you, child, only to enlighten your ignorance and counterfeit prejudices. If you are a good girl we shall agree nicely. I hope so, for your mother's sake."

But "my lady" was sorely disappointed in her niece. She had hoped to find something of the mother's sweet self-forgetfulness and sunny nature in the daughter; in lieu of which her keen eyes detected a shallow, time-serving spirit, a poor, mean pride, and selfish aims. In her heart she said, "Would Olive stood in her place?" for the young tragedienne had won her way into Lady Desma's love.

There was much in the after-days for Flossie to learn and to forget, but she proved herself an apt pupil. It is true that when first she went to the play she professed herself terribly shocked because there was a death scene; but she speedily overcame her prejudices, and bade fair to be as much a woman of the world as any of her aunt's acquaintances.

Lady Desma watched her with unappreciative eyes, and was not a little surprised to find that Olive grew really attached to her pretty blonde ward; that she regarded all her weaknesses with affectionate leniency, and readily forgave her little petulant displays.

Flossie quickly learned the Mayfair jargon, and who was or was not an eligible *parti*, and amongst all the men she met, singled out Oscar Lord Lindsay as chief favourite.

But her blandishments seemed to have small effect upon him. Much to Flossie's disgust he preferred Olive's society to hers. It was to the tragedienne he spoke in lowered tones, and with a love-light in his eyes; it

was to her he brought gifts of flowers and books; she, whom he strove ardently and persistently to rouse to some quicker, keener emotion than she had yet known.

He was generous and singularly pure in moral tone and his way of life, but he was proud, with a pride akin to Lucifer's; proud of his unsullied name, of his ancient race, and Flossie hoped that one besetting sin of his would prevent his marrying the woman she called friend, and who was as ice to him.

That there was a mystery about Olive's parentage she was convinced. She had vainly tried to learn what it was by judicious inquiries of Lady Desma and Miss Byron (whom Olive called aunt). But she could elicit nothing satisfactory from either, and her most intimate acquaintances knew no more than she had already learned.

Often she was seen in the Row with my lady and Olive, and she could scarcely fail to notice that men and women seemed to delight to pay her rival (as she chose to call her) homage. It was gall and wormwood to her, but she bided her time, hoping in the end to win the prize for which she strove.

One day she sat with Lord Lindsay in a sequestered part of Lady Desma's conservatory, and very adroitly she turned the conversation upon Olive. She praised her voice, her genius, her gracious words and ways, until Oscar believed he had been unjust to the golden-haired syren beside him, and chatted more familiarly than was his wont.

Then Flossie asked if he had known her father, and she noticed with a thrill of malicious triumph that he flushed darkly, and his voice sounded cold and hard as he answered,—

"Mr. Byron was only her father by adoption. Doubtless Miss Byron would answer all your questions readily enough."

"Oh, I am not curious," carelessly; "I only thought I should like to know something of her antecedents. But I would not like to question her. I, too, am an orphan," casting down her eyes, and sighing softly, "and I know how a chance word will reopen wounds that have seemed long since healed."

She looked so pretty, so innocent, so altogether childlike and fair, that Oscar reversed his previous judgment of her, and lingered beside her, hoping to hear more of Olive. But she spoke next of unequal marriages, and lifting her forget-me not eyes to his in half-entreaty, said,—

"I am sometimes afraid that folks look down upon me. You see my mother married very much beneath her, and such things are not easily forgotten. My father was a Nonconformist clergyman; he won her heart by his addresses at a camp meeting to which she had gone in a spirit of mischief. Of course her family cast her off, and I fancy that broke her heart. I would speak with all tenderness of her, still I can but maintain that she should have allied herself to a man who was her equal. To be perfectly happy in marriage a man or woman should mate with one whose standing is as their own. Do not you think so?"

He answered at random, and then took his leave, wondering, for the first time since he had loved Olive, why he should doubt that marriage with her was his ultimate good. There was a mystery about her birth, and he hated mysteries; and still further, the woman who should be mother to his children must bear a stainless name.

CHAPTER II.

ONE day, when Flossie Franklin and Olive were together, the former said coaxingly, "Tell me something of yourself. Although we are such friends I seem to know nothing of you prior to the day we met."

"There is not much to tell," Olive answered, and even in the dim light Flossie saw she had

grown pale. She laid her yellow head upon the other's shoulder, and went on woeingly,—
"Surely you must have been a clever child; tell me a little of your quite early days!"
Olive shuddered.

"I cannot, they are too terrible to recall!"
Flossie's blue eyes gleamed triumphantly; but she only said, in a reproachful tone, "Oh! you do not trust me, or you would confide in me," and by sweet insistence she won her will.

When the story ended she drew a little from Olive, scorn and wonder upon her face; but Olive saw nothing; her head was drooped upon her arms, and heavy sobs were shaking her.

At last she stretched out her hand to Flossie. "Oh!" she wailed; "surely you will not turn from me! Be pitiful; remember what a cruel fate mine is. Beside yourself none but Lady Desma knows my history—she has not failed me."

"Neither will I," murmured Flossie, but she did not put her arms about her friend, or seek to touch her; in her voice there was more than a *souffron* of coldness, and Olive winced under it.

"Oh!" she said, in a tone of concentrated bitterness and grief, "must my birth always set me apart from you all? Because of the blood in my veins, must my genius stand for naught? Shall I be always thrust aside, be always lonely to the day of my death?"

She ceased, and Flossie answered glibly, "Of course I love you, Olive, and you are more than foolish to doubt me; but I cannot help feeling that we are not exactly on an equal footing; and I must say I think you should allow your story to be made public. Your silence may do much harm, and my principles forbid me to countenance deceit in any form."

The weary dark head was lifted then, and the wonderful liquid eyes sought to pierce the darkness, with a longing to know what expression the fair face wore.

Then a sweet voice, rich and tender, despite its passion and pain, murmured,—

"I know too well what thought is in your heart, and I wish Lady Desma had spared me the pain of this disclosure. Oh, Flossie! by your womanhood be kind to me, keep my secret intact. If once it became public property the shame and horror of it would kill me."

She heard the rustling of Flossie's silken skirts as she moved nearer.

"Poor, silly Olive, to imagine such harsh things of me!" and she lightly touched the bowed head with her lips; "of course I shall keep your secret intact. Suppose, dear, we agree to forget all you have said? After all, one should not be blamed for one's birth."

The beautiful dark eyes, so pathetic in their pain and humiliation, looked gratefully into the blue and smiling ones; the slender supple hands clasped the plump little fingers fervently.

"You do me good, Flossie; you make me believe one may be loved and honoured for what one is."

"Of course one may;" promptly. "Now I am positively certain the story you have told me would make no difference to the regard Lord Lindsay has for you. My dear, if you but chose, you might marry him to-morrow."

"I am not likely to marry any man, and I certainly should not do so if the man who sought me were in ignorance of my antecedents. And do you suppose a man so proud, so justly proud, of his stainless name, would stoop to marry such an one as I, a child of a despised race, heinous only to shame?"

The anguish in her voice silenced even Flossie, who sat toying impatiently with her bracelets, and whilst she pondered what comfort to offer, Lady Desma entered.

"Sitting in the dark," she said, gaily, "and indulging in confidences? I hardly thought you were likely to do such a thing, Miss Byron?"

As she spoke a servant entered with the

lamps, and their light falling full upon Olive showed her pale and wan, with dark circles about her eyes.

"Come out into the garden," she said, and drew her unresistingly into the square enclosure dignified by that name. It was very small, but in town a patch of ground, sweet with the odour of flowers, is valued at its true worth.

"Now, what has Flossie said to take the brightness out of your face and voice?"

"She has said nothing," with a quick wish to shield the girl from her aunt's displeasure. "She was only a little curious about my early life, and, yielding to her entreaties, I told her my story—my most unhappy story"—and then the sweet voice faltered, and the dusky eyes grew piteous.

Lady Desma made a gesture of utmost impatience. "You are a bigger fool than I believed! Your infatuation for that shallow-hearted, cunning piece of womanhood is beyond me. You have put a weapon into her hand that she will not be slow to use against you."

"Indeed! No Lady Desma, you wrong her; to me she appears the very embodiment of artlessness and affection. And why should I hide my secret from her? Are we not friends?"

"Are you not fiddlesticks!" retorted my lady, with more vehemence than elegance. "Upon my word, Olive, you are unfit to cope with folks as a child. Your profession seems not to have helped you at all in that respect!"

Olive sighed, as if she were weary of the subject.

"Perhaps," she said, heavily, "I inherit some of the traditional simplicity of my race?"

"Your race!" contemptuously. "Why will you always harp upon that string? Apparently you forget your father's people."

Olive made a swift and passionate gesture.

"If you love me, forget him; to remember him is to remember my shame!"

Lady Desma would have answered, but at that moment they were joined by Flossie, who looked bewitching in white, with a fleecy pale blue wrap about her head and snowy shoulders.

Soon afterwards Olive took her leave; and she did not meet her friends again for several days: then it was at a garden party given by a pretty young matron, named Mrs. Heather. Lord Lindsay was present, looking a trifle haggard and perplexed, for since he last saw Olive he had undergone much mental torture concerning her.

He loved her, and being an honourable man felt he had gone too far in his attentions to draw back without some full and perfect explanation of the motives that actuated him. He must know all there was to know about her birth and early life before he ventured to make her his wife; but delicacy had forbidden him to institute inquiries concerning these things, and to Olive he would not apply.

So, instead of seeking her out, as he had been used to do, he carefully avoided her, and was really grateful when Lady Desma pounced upon him.

He was conscious that Olive's dark eyes followed him wistfully. He saw much of the beauty and light leave her face, and his heart ached for her; but, being a strong man, he held on to his purpose tenaciously.

Flossie, radiant in white, was more than usually cordial and bright; she was anxious to please, and knowing he detested hearing one woman decry another, she was very lavish in her praise of her numerous acquaintances and friends.

Mrs. Heather had some rare roses, and presently Oscar proposed they should go and inspect them. Flossie was quite willing, but Lady Desma pleaded fatigue as a reason for retaining her seat under the chestnuts.

"Have you seen Miss Byron yet?" she questioned, as Lindsay was leaving her; and she looked keenly into his eyes.

"Yes—from a distance; she is besieged at

present by admirers, so I have had no chance for speech."

"Flossie, as you pass, tell her where you have left me, and say I am anxiously waiting her."

Smiling, and promising obedience, Flossie moved off with her escort; but when they drew near the group, of which Olive formed the centre, the latter broke away, and went quickly in an opposite direction.

Oscar flushed most unmistakably, whilst Flossie said,—

"Oh! do you think it possible I have offended her?" and her pretty brow was puckered with a frown, her infantile mouth drooped at the corners.

Oscar felt a greater liking for his companion than he had ever before experienced, and hastened to frame excuses for Olive. Flossie interrupted him.

"Oh! please don't blame her in the least; were I so unhappily situated as she, I should, in all probability, be as sensitive."

He started.

"How is Miss Byron 'unhappily situated'?" She should be a contented woman. Youth, intellect—genius, I should say; famous and increasing in prosperity—what more can she desire?"

Flossie sighed, and said, in a surprised tone,—

"I thought you knew her history. Poor Olive! how cruelly hard it is that 'the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children.'"

"I know nothing. Will it be any breach of confidence to tell me all you know of Miss Byron's antecedents? Believe me, my happiness is nearly concerned."

Flossie's heart was full of "envy, hatred, and malice," but her face was childlike in its innocent gravity.

"Why, I thought everybody knew her sad story. I heard it shortly after my introduction to her, and it has but made me love her the more—because I know how much she needs sympathy and friendship."

They had reached the rose garden now; and the whole air was heavy with the fragrance of the La Frances, Burgundys, Maréchal Niels, and countless other specimens.

Flossie paused, and lifted her innocent blue eyes to her companion's face.

"How beautiful it is!" she said softly; "I could stay here for ever, provided summer and the roses were eternal too."

"Let me take you to a seat," he answered, careless of the lavish beauty before him. "I want you to tell me all you know of our mutual friend."

She suffered him to do as he wished, and presently they were resting under an arbour composed wholly of roses and honeysuckle, and he bent an attentive face upon her. She toyed with the lace of her sunshade as she spoke, and kept her eyes coyly cast down.

"Can you see Olive now?" she questioned, in her low, clear tones.

"Yes; she is talking to Colonel Warland."

"Does not her face suggest some idea to you?"

"No; why should it? She is looking perfectly lovely."

Flossie's blue eyes were uplifted suddenly; there was an angry flash in them; but Oscar was not regarding her—all his attention was given to Olive.

She was wearing a cream dress, with crimson plush panels and slashes; there were crimson flowers at her throat and waist, and the perfectly-fitting bodice, the long, sweeping folds of her skirt, showed every line and curve of the graceful figure.

Perhaps she had never shown to more advantage than she did then, despite her pallor and the wistfulness of her eyes, and it went to Oscar's heart with a pang that the story he insisted on hearing might for ever tear from him all this loveliness and grace, be a barrier between him and his heart's desire.

"I am waiting," he said, impatiently; "and,

Miss Franklin, as you love her (and in mercy to me), make your narrative short."

"Ought I to tell you?" with charming hesitancy.

"Most certainly; for upon your words rests all my life's happiness or misery!"

"And if it were misery?" in a low and wooing voice.

"Better misery than shame. See, you are her friend; you love her, so to you I will confess the truth. Miss Byron is the woman I have chosen for my wife; but, if any disgrace attaches to her, the words I long to say will never be said. For the honour of my race, my wife must be like Caesar's."

The girl's mean, envious heart throbbed with triumph, but her face was expressive only of pain and perplexity.

"I suppose I ought to tell you; but oh I pray it may make no difference to Olive's future. She is so good and noble, she deserves all love, all reverence."

Then, after a pause,—

"Did you ever wonder where she obtained her unusually dark complexion, her wonderful eyes. Can't you guess what blood is in her veins?"

The thought that came to him struck him with horror and repulsion; he would not consent to entertain it.

"Go on," he said, "I hate guess work."

"Olive Byron is the child of a quadroom slave by her master."

Oscar sat silent. The expression of his face might have frightened another woman, or appealed to her pity; but Flossie was neither nervous nor pitiful.

"She was a pretty creature, and she was fond of her master; so when he brought home a wife, and she was sent into the fields to work, she grew violent and reckless, took to drinking and evil ways. At last she escaped, and, after leading a life of shame in France, crossed to England, bringing Olive with her. Then, being reduced to starvation, she took her child into the streets and begged her bread; and, when Olive grew older, she taught her simple songs, which she sang in public squares and roads. In those days she used to boast her unmercifully, and seemed to hate her; but, at last, Mr. Byron happened to hear the child singing, and was struck by her voice and appearance. He gave the woman Zoë a sovereign, and claimed Olive as his own. She does not know if her mother lives or no, but she is in daily fear of meeting her."

Silence so deep and profound that Flossie feared to break it. All around and about them was the beauty of a June day, but Oscar sat unheeding, conscious only of one thought, "Lost to me! Oh! Heaven, lost to me!"

How could he make this child of slavery and sin his wife? Would not the long line of his ancestors rise to reproach him for the dishonour brought upon their ancient name? Suppose he married her, and in after years children were born to him; should he not find some taint of that despised race in them? Or, if they questioned of their mother's people, what answer should he give? The uncharitable (not to say conceited) words of the hero of Locksley Hall returned to him.

"I, to herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains,

Like a beast with lower pleasures, like a beast with lower pains!"

He roused himself, and, with a sigh that was closely allied to a groan, said,—

"Thank you, Miss Franklin, you have done me a great service; and, as you said, Miss Byron is to be pitied greatly. Shall I take you back to Lady Desma?"

She walked quietly with him to the place where her aunt was sitting, but her feet kept time to the words "She has lost him! lost him! lost him!" and her face flushed, her eyes grew bright with triumph.

A little later Oscar was missing. No one had seen him go; he had not even acquainted his hostess with his intention; and none but Flossie could give any explanation of his

strange conduct, and of course she was discreetly silent.

She noticed how her rival's sweet eyes were dim with anguish, how the tender mouth drooped with bitter mournfulness, but she had no ruth upon her. She knew very well Lady Desma disliked and distrusted her, and, unless she married before she was of age, would most probably send her back to Sunny-mead, when her enforced guardianship ended; and, having tasted of the pleasures of a fashionable life, she loathed even the memory of the old days.

My lord went back to his chambers and locked himself in, whilst he fought the battle he knew would end in renunciation of Olive. He loved her deeply and truly, but not so unselfishly that he could forget her origin or lift her to his own rank.

The conflict was fierce and strong. Love cried vehemently to be heard, but pride clamoured more loudly still; and, just as night was falling, Oscar threw out his arms before him, and, dropping his face upon them, groaned, "I give in; but oh, my love! my love! what have you cost me?" And seeing the long years spread out before him in dreary sameness, he cursed the day on which he saw her first.

He went to the Olympus that night, and, from a quiet nook, watched Olive, listened to her voice, witnessed her triumph. Never had she been more impassioned, more eloquent, and he did not guess "her heart was breaking for a little love."

CHAPTER III.

It was Sunday evening; Miss Byron had gone to church, and Olive sat alone in her drawing-room.

It was growing dark, but she did not ring for lights; in her state of mind she preferred the semi-gloom.

Life had suddenly grown very bitter to her. Not all the fame so justly hers—not all the admiration that fell to her lot—could fill the void in her heart, or satisfy her craving for that which she said could never be hers.

"Love," she whispered to herself; "is not for me. I must stand by and see other women wooed and won—happy in the affection of good men. Yet why—why should there be such a ban upon me? Am I not gifted? Have I not personal charms, and a loyal heart? Oh! it is not just; it is not just! How shall I bear to live through all my days alone?"

She hid her face upon the sofa cushions, and spread her arms out before her with an infinitely pathetic gesture of anguish and despair.

She was so young and so strong that it seemed to her she might live fifty or sixty years to endure her misery.

"Oh!" she wailed. "Would to Heaven I might lie down to-night, and never wake again!"

Below she heard the sound of many feet upon the hot and dusty pavement; the ripple of laughter, the light words of badinage floated up to her, and she pressed her hands to her ears as though to shut out all sound of the gay world.

"There has not been one good day in all my life," she said. "Each has been marred by cruelty or the thought of my shame. What have I done to deserve such a fate? Surely, surely the curse has rested upon my unhappy race long enough. Will it never be taken away?"

"Lord Lindsay," announced a servant, and she lifted herself slowly as Oscar went forward; but she was trembling so violently, was so sick and giddy with sudden rapture, that she could not speak. There was still light enough for him to see the lithe, supple, white-robed figure to mark its sinuous grace. He could see, too, that above her white gown her face gleamed whiter, and that her dark eyes were wild with emotion.

"I must apologize for my intrusion," he

said, possessing himself of her slender cold hand; and then the commonplace words died on his lips, and he stood silent as she, still retaining the fingers in his clasp,—

"Why—have—you—come?" she questioned, pantingly; and then went on. "Was it well done? Is it wise?"

"I cannot answer either question until you have replied to one upon which rests my whole life's happiness."

She sank upon the couch once more, wondering if, indeed, he had come to offer her his love, and praying she might be strong enough to resist the temptation that would assail her.

"Olive!" he said; and his voice was hardly lover-like in its tone. "Olive, I have heard a strange story recently concerning you. I want you to confirm or deny it. My darling—oh, my darling! and whatever comes you must be that still—with all my heart I love you. There is nothing I so desire as the dear gift of your affection; but I owe it to my race—to all our old traditions—to marry as befits me. Your profession I honour; you yourself know how greatly I esteem you; but I must be assured that there is no stain upon your name, that your birth is honourable, before I dare ask you to join lots with me. Sweet, why do you shiver and shrink from me? Good heavens! It is not true what folks say?"

"What do they say?" she questioned, with stiff, white lips. "Do not be afraid to tell me. I have borne so many evils that one more or less cannot signify."

"It is an insult to tell you!" he cried, carried away by his passion. "My queen, my pearl amongst women! I love you, I love you! Let come what may I will make you my wife! Life without you would not be worth living."

Her broken sighs alone stirred the sudden silence of the room. She had wrenched her hands from his grasp, and now sat with her face hidden in them.

"Hush!" she said, in a tone scarcely above a whisper. "You are saying mad and foolish things! Were I to listen to you to-night—tomorrow you would reproach me! Say what you came to say, and leave me? Who has told you anything of my most unhappy story?"

He hesitated, and before he had framed any reply she broke in rapidly, with quickest, keenest anguish,—

"I know, I know! Ah! there is no need to tell me. My past is known to only two people in the outside world. Lady Desma would not publish it. Oh, my friend! oh, my friend! You, too, have failed me."

She lay silent and motionless, her long dark hair all fallen loose over her agonised face. Oscar bent lower.

"Olive," he whispered, "say it is not true; tell me you are the child of honourable parents, honourably born?"

She started up, and laughed shrilly.

"Shall I lie to you?—you who hold my heart in the hollow of your hand?—you who may read my thoughts as a book?—where would be the use? And would I deceive you if I could? All is true that you have heard. I am a child of shame; my mother was my father's favourite slave; she was one of the worst and lowest of her sex. What wonder, when one reflects, that she came of a degraded down-trodden race? Oh! when I think on their wrongs and mine, my heart is hot against our natural enemies. Is it well you should lord it over us, traffic in our blood! Ah! forgive me, forgive me! My woes have made me mad."

She threw herself on her knees before him, her arms upraised as if in supplication, but her chin had dropped upon her bosom, and her eyes refused to look at him.

"Speak," she cried. "Your silence frightens me. Blame me if you will, that I have hugged my secret close, but do not hate me utterly."

"Heaven knows, I have no heart to blame you," he said, in a stifled tone. "It was natural you should wish the past buried out of sight and memory; and Olive, do you dream I could by

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"Heaven knows, if you had been poor only, friendless to the last degree, I would have made you my wife!"

"I know!—I know! But I am the offspring of shame and sin. Leave me, oh, leave me! Do not look upon me in my degradation. Love!—love!—if this poor life of mine could make you blest, I would gladly lay it down for your sake, here and now. If these poor hands could lift you to some higher, happier place, they would not cease to labour day or night. But seeing I am helpless, that all my prayers cannot make your days happy, I am fain to die. Oh, love! Oh, my soul's love! kiss me once again—then go. This anguish is more than I can bear!"

Darker and darker grew the room. The streets were growing quieter. She lifted her eyes to the dark sky, where not a star shone to lighten the gloom. She moved her hands, as if in supplication, then sat silent and dismayed, her breath coming gaspingly from between her parted lips.

"My dear," she began, in gentle remonstrance of the gloominess of the room; but she paused suddenly as a white figure moved swiftly towards her, crying,—

friend Olive was crouching at her feet, sobbing wildly and hysterically. "Kill me as I kneel, now and here! If you have any mercy on me, any love for me, and my most miserable life! I am not fit to live. I cannot hold up my head amongst you. Oh, my heart! oh, my shamed, despoiled life! Friend, dear, friend, let me die at your feet! Do not—do not seek to raise me," and she grovelled lower, whilst Miss Byron trembled with fear and love.

"He has seen me in my degradation. Has put me aside for ever (what else could he do?) and now, if God would send me death, I would thank Him from the depths of my grateful heart."

She drew the sobbing girl close to her breast, pillowed the lovely dark head there, and touching her cheek with an indescribably tender gesture, spoke so softly and so lowly, that her voice hardly seemed to break the silence of the room.

She broke off with a little sob, and, weeping, caught the girl closer yet to her loyal, loving heart. So through long minutes, which by reason of their agony seemed hours, she soothed and wept with the girl who was to her

It was late when Olive went to her room, but even then she could not sleep. She looked on her life as it was, and as it would be, and prayed madly for courage to bear its unlifting woe, its heavy weariness. All the beauty and sweetness of the night were lost upon her, as she knelt with hidden face, wrestling with such anguish as, thank Heaven, falls to the lot of few! In the morning she went down pale and heavy-eyed; sick with the sense of desolation. Her lover had deserted her, her friend had betrayed her, and with the exception of Miss Byron, it seemed to her all the world was against her!

"She is as dark as a creole," said one, and the other answered "or a quadroon," and Olive, overhearing, shuddered, and grew sick at heart.

"Did you see Miss Byron pass?" she asked abruptly.

"That is a charming piece of condescension on your part," my lady answered with acerbity; "the time has not long since gone when you railed at her profession, and feared to be known as her friend."

She was very fair and dainty, she seemed innocent and kind. Lord Lindsay must marry one day; why not choose this pretty creature, who seemed not averse to him.

Lady Desma did not invite him to lunch as was her wont. With a cold good-bye she entered her house, and when Flossie followed her to her boudoir she considerably startled that young lady by grasping her shoulders fiercely, and demanding, "What *this* meant."

"REALLY, aunt," the girl retorted, with covert insolence, "you must be more explicit." There was a flash of anger in her blue eyes, and an ominous lowering of the pretty brows.

"There is no occasion for me to explain my meaning. Why did you so deliberately ignore Olive? What has changed Lord Lindsay?"

"Do you suppose," with a shrug of her shoulders, "that I can associate with the daughter of a dissolute quadroon? And if Lord Lindsay shares my prejudices, am I to blame?"

"And yet only twenty minutes ago you swore you loved Miss Byron."

"Of course I did," laughing shortly. "Are society women invariably truthful? Aunt, you have often impressed upon me the misery arising from unequal matches. I profit by your teaching. I shall save Oscar Lindsay from a foolish step, and advance my own welfare. Can you believe that, knowing all, he would marry her?"

"Do you mean you have told him the story?" and under the blazing scorn of her aunt's eyes Flossie winced. "Answer me, girl; *you* will have the truth!"

"I did tell him!" slowly and affrightedly.

My lady turned upon her with such an expression of rage and repulsion that Flossie trembled.

"I have done no wrong," she said, sullenly. "I only spoke truth."

Lady Desma silenced her by a swift and angry gesture.

"Silence!" she said, passionately; "make no excuses; none could be offered for such conduct as yours. You make me doubt you are your mother's child. Contrast your ways, your thoughts, with those of this poor wronged girl, and who is most entitled to Saxon honour, Saxon fealty. I will not live in the same house with you; you shall not stay to perfect your schemes. To-morrow you return to Sunnymead!"

Flossie laughed scoffingly.

"You forget, aunt, you are my guardian for two and a-half years yet; however greatly you may hate me you cannot rid yourself of your responsibility. I fancy you would find yourself checkmated."

Nothing could exceed the insolence of the girl's tone and manner, the impertinent defiance and anger in the blue eyes. My lady sighed, as she turned from the contemplation of her niece's pretty face.

"Unfortunately I cannot rid myself of you; neither will I attempt to prejudice Oscar Lindsay against you. He deserves to be punished for his base desertion of Miss Byron. I cannot wish him a bitterer punishment than marriage with you means."

She passed from the room, and Flossie, throwing aside hat and gloves, sank upon a couch, smiling significantly. When the luncheon-bell sounded she did not join my lady, and a servant going to seek her found her asleep, with a smile of cherubic sweetness upon her pretty fair face.

A few days later, as Olive was returning from rehearsal alone (Miss Byron being confined to her room by a severe headache), a tattered figure brushed by her. Absorbed in her own thoughts she paid no attention to the vagrant, who stood upon the kerb, leering at her sardoniously. She was altogether unaware that the dreadful creature turned and followed her stealthily; she did not hear the low chuckle that broke from the sensual lips, as the woman drew nearer and nearer to her.

In merciful ignorance of what awaited her she entered her own home, and went wearily upstairs. But she was not destined to enjoy peace long. Suddenly a clamour arose in the hall, and as it increased in volume and strength she went to the landing, and, lifting her voice, asked what was passing. A servant volunteered the information that a woman demanded to see her—a "beggar-woman," in accents of supreme disdain. Annoyed that such a creature should have forced her way into the hall, Olive ran downstairs. She saw the crowd of mocking servants, heard their scoffing words, and caught at a maid to prevent herself falling, because, before and above all, she was conscious of one face she had hoped had long since rested under the quiet earth.

A dreadful face, with matted black hair tumbled about it, bloodshot eyes and purple complexion—whatever beauty the woman might once have possessed was gone for ever, destroyed by debauchery and prolonged intemperance. Her clothes hung about her in rags, her hands were dirty and claw-like, and she looked more like a bird of prey than a human creature. Seeing Olive, she darted forward and cried in a hoarse, thick voice,—

"Ah, my child! my child!"

But the unhappy girl shrank back.

"Don't touch me," she cried, in a terrified tone, "for Heaven's sake, don't touch me. Who—who are you?"

"Who am I? Come now, you know! Your poor, unhappy mother, who has been searching years and years for you. Oh, dear! oh, dear!" beginning to whine, "I thought you'd have been glad to see me."

Still that stony look of horror on Olive's pure, sweet face; still that motion of the hand to the heart.

"How can I believe you? Oh, I will not, I dare not, lest I go mad! Surely my mother cannot have fallen so low. No, no, I am not your child. You lie! Oh! Heaven be thanked, you lie!"

"Do I?" the other demanded viciously. "Turn up your sleeve, your left sleeve, and tell me what you see?"

Mechanically Olive did as she was bidden, and the wondering servants saw the white arm above the elbow was marked with her name, and around it lay the coils of a serpent in vivid blue.

The woman laughed exultantly.

"That marks you as my child. I picked out those things when you were a tiny tot not more than eighteen months old. Do you believe me now?"

"Oh, heaven! I must," and, shuddering, she would have fallen had not Miss Byron stolen behind and thrown an arm around her.

"Well, look here," urged the woman, dogmatically, "you don't think I'm going to live in want whilst you live on the fat of the land, and queen it with the best! Now I've found you I mean to stay with you, and show you what a mother's love is like. You've not known it for many years," and she began once more to whine.

"Come upstairs," Olive answered, heavily, conscious of the curious eyes bent on her.

Her new-found mother followed staggering up the carpeted stairs, commenting loudly on all she saw.

They passed by one consent at Miss Byron's room. That lady, with a gesture of infinite contempt, signed to the coloured woman to enter.

"You must have a bath, and change those rags for something more decent; I will give you some clothes until you can get others made. And when you have bettered your appearance we will talk of your future."

She drew Olive away, and in silence they entered the latter's boudoir; then the two women fell into each other's arms, and sobbed as though their hearts would break.

But at last, wrenching herself free from Miss Byron's embrace, Olive signed to her to leave her; and being once more alone, cast herself down upon the ground, moaning and writhing, sobbingly questioning what further ill was to befall her; unconsciously asking, in the Laureate's words, "How could he love a thing so low?"

When her agony had somewhat spent itself, she rose faint and exhausted, and bathing her face and eyes, went downstairs to her friend.

Later on they were joined by Zoë Donato, and Olive listened whilst Miss Byron endeavoured to make terms with her.

But she was obstinate; she would not accept an allowance if with the allowance came separation from her child.

She had found her after many years, and she intended staying with her to the end of her days.

No bribes, no threats, had any power upon her, and finally Olive said, wearily,—

"Let her alone; after all, she is my—my mother; my home is hers by right of that relationship."

So Zoë became an inmate of the once peaceful house, and soon it was all too obvious that her dominant vice was intemperance.

In vain Olive and Miss Byron endeavoured to place her beyond the reach of temptation; in their temporary and enforced absences from home she stole their goods, and pledged or sold them to obtain alcoholic drink. She disgraced them in every conceivable way, and Olive's story was soon town-talk.

At the theatre she experienced a difference (not pleasant) in the manner of the other actresses towards her, and only one of their number seemed anxious in any way to alleviate the wretchedness of her lot.

Lady Desma proved herself a true friend in those dark days; she was to be seen with Olive in all the haunts of fashion, whither she dragged the reluctant girl. She spent

hours with her at her own residence, and was the only creature who exercised any control over Zoë.

One day she encountered Lord Lindsay.

"Oscar," she said, "this is a very dreadful thing about Olive."

"Great heavens, yes," he answered, hoarsely. "Lady Desma, you know the hopes I once nursed concerning her; you were the first to guess my love for her; yet even you cannot tell what a struggle it was to let her go; how my passion for her has spoiled my whole life. But if I had married her, think of the degradation each would have suffered through that woman's agency."

"She won't live for ever," bluntly, "and on her own head be her sins. Why should Olive suffer for her parent's crimes?"

"It is the law of the world."

"More shame to the world that it should be so. You have disappointed me greatly, and failed her miserably. You are not the generous, unselfish man I believed you, and I hope you will live to repent your folly," with which she left him in high dudgeon.

It was about the time of rehearsal, and remembering this, he bent his steps towards the Olympus, and arrived there in time to meet Olive as she came out.

Her carriage was awaiting her, and as she stepped into it he spoke her name. A flush of colour tinged her pale face a moment, but it died out quickly, leaving her whiter than before.

"I must speak to you," he said, hurriedly. "May I get up?"

"Yes, my lord," with a painful humility in voice and manner, and stepping in he seated himself beside her.

"What have you been thinking of me?" he questioned, fixing his haggard eyes on her changed and most unhappy face. "Have your thoughts been very bitter ones?"

"No," she answered slowly, and as one who stays to choose her words, careful of giving offence. "I felt that what you did was the only thing left you to do; and much as I deplored your decision, I knew it was the only one you could make."

"Olive! Olive! You never doubted my love?"

"Oh, no; but for the memory of that—the one sweet and holy thing in my life—I should have gone mad, or ended all long since—long since. Oh! the misery I have borne and still bear; it would kill a weaker woman, but I am so terribly strong." She suddenly turned her gaze upon him searchingly. "Tell me, do you see much change in me? Have I not grown thinner, paler, more languid? If you would comfort me, say you believe my life is wearing away—that rest is coming soon for me? Oh! if you love me you will not withhold such a hope from me!"

"Olive, my darling, my queen! You do not know what you say, or you would hesitate before you pained me so sorely. Love, love! these past few weeks have shown me my heart—have taught me all that you are to me. I cannot live without you. Forget my past madness, my intolerable pride. Come to me as my wife, my dear and honoured wife!"

"Oh, hush! oh, hush!" she cried. "Now, indeed, you are mad. My story is public property now. Would you have your wife pointed to as the offspring of a slave? Oh, no! oh, no! you must not do yourself this wrong. Should I love you truly to drag you down to my own level? Do you not know that you are dearer to me than happiness, or any hope of happiness? That if my life could all be spent in your service, its days would be too short to prove the strength and depth of my devotion? To die for you would be joy and glory to me. To live for you I dare not hope. Oh, love, love! let me speak plainly now and for the last time—solemnly, as though I were on my deathbed. Between us there can be no union; we shall never clasp hands in consecrated affection; I shall never bear your name. All my past rises up to warn me this

CHAPTER V.

thing you dream of cannot be. *I would die rather than it should be.*

Her voice, though vehement, was so low that her words were barely audible to him. He tried to touch her hand, to clasp it in his own, but she shivered away from him.

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" she said; "do not touch me, you will make me false to myself and you. Ah! my dear, when we say good-bye to-day we shall have parted for ever. I hope for my own sake we shall not meet again. At the close of my engagement I shall leave England. Perhaps in another country, among other scenes, I may partly forget my woe."

"You shall not leave me," he said, under his breath. "You have made me yours for all time; you will not have the heart to leave me now, just when I feel my need—my unutterable need, of you?"

She sighed and shook her head.

"Through long ages the women of my race have been the slaves of yours; how, then, should I be your wife? Ah! no—no! You over-estimate your love and your courage. To-day it is good-bye for us."

They had reached her home now, and mechanically he assisted her to alight. He felt any further pleading was useless, and yet he hoped against hope; and in the vain belief that he might yet turn her heart to him, he asked if he might go in with her.

"Yes," she said, "perhaps you will find your healing here," and she led the way into the house.

As they went towards the breakfast room he heard a terrible voice alternately raving and singing negro melodies. He glanced at Olive; sick and faint, with hands pressed close to her heart, she leaned against the wall.

"Listen!" she said; "listen! but oh! in mercy turn away your eyes from me. That is my mother's voice, and she is in one of her drunken fits."

She roused herself suddenly, and almost ran into the room before him; but he followed, and before she could elude him clasped her in his arms.

"Sweet and dear, come to me! None can help you save me," and he essayed to kiss her, but she wrenched herself from him.

"No, no, no; do not persuade me. This is my rightful place; let me kneel here and thank you for all your goodness, all your honourable love. Do not raise me; here with my face hidden, my hands fast held in yours, I can say what is in my heart. Heaven bless you, make you happy as you deserve to be; crown all your life with goodness, and for your comfort may you learn forgetfulness of me—the woman who loved you from first to last, whose whole soul rises up to thank you now for all your goodness."

Before he could reply, or in any way attempt to soothe her, the door was opened violently, and a half-clad figure appeared. Olive started to her feet; the horror and repugnance on her face were such that Oscar turned his eyes from her.

A woman, looking far older than she really was, bloated and hideous, was glaring upon them, her hands nervously clatching at imaginary objects before her.

"See!" said Olive, brokenly, "to what depths you propose to sink! This is my mother! Could you bear to have anything in common with her?"

He could not answer. The spectacle before him was too terrible to allow of speech. He heard Olive's sweet voice murmuring—

"Pity me! pity me! and, for love's sake, go!"

Then he roused himself, and cried,—

"It is not true! Olive, what proof have you that this woman is what she claims to be?"

For answer she rolled up her sleeve, and showed him the unsightly mark upon her arm.

"She alone of the outer world knew of this!"

And then, like one in a dream, he saw her lead the dreadful creature away, and went out, feeling his doom was sealed.

OLIVE never could tell how she lived through the three following weeks; but at length the season closed, and all the fashionable world hastened away from town.

She had intended leaving the country, but the state of Miss Byron's health forbade this; so she was compelled to accept provincial engagements, and her first carried her to Bristol.

Here she played to enthusiastic houses, and, but for the terrible presence of her mother, might have been tolerably contented.

One day when Zet had fallen into a drunken sleep she locked her in her room, and proposed to Miss Byron that they should drive to Portishead, a small watering-place about twelve miles distant.

The road lay through a lovely tract of very hilly country; the day, the scenery, and the vehicle were all that could be desired; the Jehu a model of propriety and civility.

Both Olive and Miss Byron were unusually silent, but each enjoyed the drive in her own way.

Reaching the hotel, they found it was quite full of visitors, but that they could have tea in about an hour in the public room.

Olive proposed they should stroll through the grounds and into the lovely woods beyond, and her companion assented with alacrity, glad to see the girl interested in anything. They wandered about the lawns for a while, and then branched off towards the woods; but presently they heard the voices of men and girls drawing near, and Olive immediately recognised one as Flossie's, from its peculiarly clear and bell-like quality.

She had not exchanged any words with the little Judas since she learned her treachery; but she had long ago forgiven her, and her heart longed for some sign of affection, some hint of remorse, although none ever came.

A little paler of cheek, with her breath coming faster, she held on her way until the merry party were close at hand. The path was very narrow, so that two could hardly walk abreast, and Olive drew aside to allow the others to pass.

As Flossie lifted her limpid eyes, and saw the pure and perfect face of the actress, she flushed slightly, and was a moment embarrassed; but, rapidly recovering herself, she affected not to see her old friend, and, totally ignoring her very presence, passed by with her companion, a straw-coloured millionaire.

"That was a cut direct, with a vengeance!" said the latter, with a loud laugh. "Isn't she the 'nigger' actress Lindsay was gone on?"

He was a self-made man, but it was a great pity that he had not spared a little time from building his "pile" to cultivate refinement of speech and manner.

His words reached Olive with cruel distinctness, and she stood as if turned to stone, watching the gay party as it rapidly disappeared amongst the ferns and trees. Then she turned to Miss Byron.

"Let us get away from here," she said, and, turning, rushed like a wild thing through the wood in the direction of the high road.

The brambles plucked at and tore her skirts; but in her mad haste she heeded nothing; was unconscious that her companion was far behind. Her one object was to reach the hotel by a circuitous route, the very opposite to that taken by Flossie, to order out the carriage, and drive away before incurring any further insolence.

Once outside the wood, she paused, panting, and waited for Miss Byron to join her. Neither spoke, as with faces turned towards the sea, they now walked on side by side.

There was such ungovernable anguish, such awful despair upon Olive's face and in her eyes, that the elder woman was afraid to speak.

At last the hotel was reached; their Jehu stood at the gate, and, entrusting him to settle with the proprietor, they seated themselves, and awaited his return with very scanty patience.

Olive was painfully conscious of curious faces at windows. She even caught a glimmer of golden hair, which, from its fluffiness, could belong to none but Flossie.

At last, to her unutterable relief, the coachman appeared, and soon they had left the hotel, the pier, and the little rambling town behind.

Just as they emerged from under an avenue of trees a slight figure sprang forward, and a delicately-gloved hand was held up as a signal for them to stop.

"Get out!" said Miss Franklin, imperiously to Olive, "I want to speak to you."

Without a word Olive obeyed, and they walked to a little distance together; then Flossie said, "I felt it best we should understand each other clearly, so I've been running here as fast as I could to put matters plainly before you. I dare say I hurt you a little while ago, but you must remember I have a position to maintain, and that (since your story has become known) you are a most undesirable acquaintance. I am not going to mince matters," with a cunning glance at the other's pale face and anguished eyes; "you must see for yourself that friendship between us is impossible."

"I do! I do! Heaven knows I do!" swiftly and passionately.

"Of course, whilst your estimable mother posed as dead it was all very well, but now she has been resuscitated, and has made herself so notorious, I think it expedient we should be as strangers."

The hard look upon the fair face marred its prettiness, and made it absolutely shrewish. "Your wish shall be obeyed; but oh! Flossie, how I have loved you!"

"Of course; it was to your interest to do so, especially as my aunt was so foolishly enamoured of you. Well, in future, I should be glad if you would forget you ever knew me, and as Lord Lindsay is staying here, it would be advisable not to visit the place too frequently, as he may suppose you wish to recall him to his forgotten allegiance."

"It is not likely I shall visit Portishead; my one experience of it has been all-sufficient! but"—and she could not resist a covert scoff—"perhaps you have a personal interest in Lord Lindsay's welfare?"

The answer came readily enough.

"He has hinted to Lady Desma that he intends to marry. He owes it to his position, and as I find favour in his eyes, why should I not be 'my lady'? He does not profess any passion for me, but we understand each other, and that is sufficient."

"Quite; but Miss Franklin, if he marries you, he deserves all pity. You have shown me yourself in your true colours. I wish to Heaven you had not! Oh! woman! woman! may you never regret this hour, and your treachery to me."

With a gesture of farewell she turned away; and Flossie, with a smile upon her baby face, went back to Portishead.

Heavily the next two days passed, and Olive had regained somewhat of her tranquillity when she adjourned to the theatre the second night.

The play was *The Octoroon*, and by nature and circumstance she was peculiarly fitted to play the part of heroine. There was an unusually crowded house. Lady Desma and her party were present, Lord Lindsay and the self-made man, between whom and Flossie there existed a secret understanding. Failing Oscar she intended marrying Ward, because his wealth united to Lady Desma's influence would win for her the position she so craved. She had hinted to Ward that if he would win her he must publicly degrade Olive Byron, "who is my great enemy." He was not at all averse to truckle to his lady's wishes, believing that she really had some affection for him. So to-night he had organised a plan by which he hoped to carry Flossie's heart by storm. He had engaged a number of roughs (and in Bristol such creatures are plentiful as flowers in spring) to hurl innuendos and base-

less lies at Olive as she essayed to fill her part. He had no ruth upon her; she had "nigger blood," in her veins, and "niggers ave no feeling," and why should he spare any creature who stood between him and happiness?

The play proceeded smoothly enough for a while. Olive met her usual meed of praise, and despite (perhaps because of her knowledge of Lady Desma's and Oscar's presence), played with more *verve* than usual. But in the second act a loud groaning and hissing began, coupled with expletives of an unsavoury kind—accusations that might well bring the blood to men's faces. Ladies rose in fear, men cried for silence; and there at the remote edge of the stage stood Olive, as a creature driven to bay, wild and white, with slim, clenched hands and half-closed eyes. For a moment, those who pitied her feared she would faint, and tender women wept for her, strong men felt their hearts throb faster. There arose a cry of "Turn them out! turn them out!" and indignation waxed to a terrific pitch.

Suddenly Olive moved, her eyes opened wide upon the sympathetic audience, and as they lit upon Oscar's disturbed face, Lady Desma's bowed figure, new life seemed to enter her being. With a bound she came to the front, and held up her slim hands imploring silence. There was passion on her face, in her every gesture; fear and timidity alike were forgotten in the strong desire to clear herself before her friends. Her sweet voice, clear and wild now, clove the air with piercing passion.

"I ask English justice, nothing more nor less. Will you forget your boasted character, and deal me—a defenceless, helpless woman—such cruelty, that all my life shall lie desolate before me? Oh! men who are justly proud of your ancient name and race! Oh! women, nurtured with all love, all care, give your pity to the poor child of Africa—the despised and rejected of all races. See, I am before you alone, against such fearful odds that my heart fails me; as I kneel (and now she fell upon her knees before them all), as I kneel in sight of Heaven, I am innocent of these things laid to my charge—a poor, miserable, woman, the sport of fate! Oh! if to be wretched is to be guilty, then truly I am guilty."

Then there arose such a tumult as had probably never been heard within those walls. The police were called in to expel the originators of the uproar, and still Olive knelt there, with upraised face, and supplicating hands, mutely imploring pity and belief.

The curtain was rung down, but not too soon for folks to see the stalwart figure of a man stooping over, and lifting her from her lowly posture. Papers said the next morning that her champion was Lord Lindsey, and some susceptible young ladies remembered for many months his proud bearing, his flashing eyes and defiant face, and wondered what there could be in common between my lord and the actress. However, Olive's fame suffered no slur—rather the Bristolians conspired to do her honour, as if to make reparation for the wrong done her.

Months passed, and a new season began. Mr. Ward was growing obviously impatient of Flossie's coquettishness, and was anxious to net his bird; but she still staved off the evil hour, hoping that eventually Oscar would propose. One day she sat with her straw-coloured admirer in the conservatory, and he began to plead his cause very volubly; but finding his lady-love obdurate, he urged the reasons why she should marry him.

"For your sake, Flossie, I blackened Miss Byron's name, and if the scheme miscarried, am I to blame? Did I leave a stone unturned to compass her ruin and disgrace?"

"Still she is the favourite actress in town; and as you missed your object, so it is natural you should miss your reward. Had you but driven her from England, made my triumph secure, I would have married you the next day. I hate her, would stay at nothing to complete her humiliation. You should have chosen better agents than a few Bristol roughs."

"True, Miss Franklin; they were very inefficient allies."

She started, and gave a little scream as Oscar Lindsay appeared from behind some palm ferns.

"I have been an unwilling listener to your later words. Pardon me if I feel it my duty as an Englishman to make known what I have heard."

She was silent, having no defence ready, and Oscar turning to Ward, bade him go. Something in the young lord's eye and voice made the other obey with alacrity. Then he towered over Flossie, rendering her smaller and more insignificant by contrast with his tall, stalwart figure.

"I believe, Miss Franklin, you once professed a violent friendship for Olive Byron?"

"Alias Donato. That is true; but from what transpired at a later date I felt myself constrained to end my acquaintance with her."

"And to institute a system of persecution against her?"

"It is the duty of every English lady to keep society clear of interlopers such as Olive Donato. What I did was for the good of others, as well as my personal comfort. It is extremely awkward to meet such creatures as this half-caste, who seems to have so great an interest for you," sneered Flossie.

"If it is any satisfaction to you to learn it, Miss Franklin, you are perfectly welcome to know that, being fully aware of Miss Byron's parentage, I have asked her to become my wife. If eventually she consents, I am afraid your feelings will be frequently harrowed; as Lady Lindsay, you will be compelled to meet her often."

The rage and hate on Flossie's face rendered it positively ugly.

"If you choose to disgrace yourself and family it is no concern of mine. I wish you happiness; doubtless you will find your mother-in-law a pleasing element in the family circle."

She endeavoured to pass him by, but he detained her a few moments longer. "Of course you understand I shall inform Lady Desma of the substance of your conversation with Ward?"

She began to tremble, but answered insolently,—

"You will please yourself, I have no doubt the task will be a congenial one."

And so they parted, my lord to seek Lady Desma, and impart his knowledge of Flossie's treachery to her. When he had gone, the lady went up to her niece's room, and a very stormy scene ensued. The servants heard their mistress's voice raised in anger, Flossie's alternately entreating and defying, and wondered what had caused the rupture between them.

At the conclusion, my lady said,—

"And this Ward wishes to marry you (the man must have been born a fool)!"

Flossie discreetly ignored the latter part of her speech, and answered,—

"Mr. Ward would be only too happy to make her his wife at any date she chose."

"For your own comfort's sake let it be an early one, for I am determined to rid myself of you as soon as possible. I don't want to create a scandal, and if your marriage is hurried on, it shall take place from this house. If not, I must request your father's relatives to receive you. I don't care anything about the conditions of the will, so it is useless to urge them upon me. I have always had my own way until now, and I don't intend to have any alteration in that one respect!"

Two days later the papers announced that a marriage was to take place between Mr. Ward, of Vennerton Hall, Sussex, and 7, Grosvenor-Square, to Flossie only daughter of the late Rev. Albert Franklin, and niece of Lady Desma.

There was some wonder amongst my lady's friends and acquaintances that she should allow Flossie to make such a *mésalliance*, for the bridegroom-elect was by no means a favourite; but one young lady remarked shrewdly that,

if "he were a pill he was a gilded one, and money covers a multitude of sins."

So at the close of April the marriage was consummated, and Flossie fondly hoped that she should have but to speak to be obeyed; but Mr. Ward was not capable of much passion, and having an overweening sense of his own importance, determined his wife's happiness and wishes should be secondary to his own. And it was not long before the lady learned he was most parsimonious in little things, and that her allowance was not nearly as much as she thought it should be. She learned, too, to tremble under his anger, and to be careful to give no offence.

And as week followed week, Olive's ever-increasing popularity added to her discomfort and jealousy. The actress held on her way, quietly, patiently; but those who knew her well foretold an early death for her, said that her heart was slowly breaking with the shame and horror her mother had brought upon her.

She had grown wofully pale, and the dark eyes looked far too large for the thin, wan face; the beautiful mouth had a downward droop, and even her voice was changed. Through the rich and liquid tones there vibrated always a note of agony that brought tears to the eyes of many as she uttered passionate or plaintive speeches; it seemed to her that only her art saved her from madness!

CHAPTER VI.

ON a bright May morning a woman of curious gait and appearance hurried through the busy streets, with a bundle under her arm. She was so evidently foreign, so strange and hideous to look upon, that folks involuntarily glanced after her; but she took no notice of passers-by, being intent upon one object—the disposal of her bundle for as high a price as she could wheedle from the broker. Now and again she chuckled to herself, remembering how cleverly she had eluded Miss Byron's vigilance.

At last she came to a shop whose distinctive character was marked by three gilded balls, and here she entered, to reappear after awhile with some coins clutched tightly in her right hand.

Her dull eyes glanced vacantly round, and then she started at a run to gain the other side of the road.

There was a shout, a sudden sick feeling of dread in the hearts of many, and then the woman fell to the ground like a log, under the very feet of two noble carriage horses.

The occupant of the carriage sprang out as soon as the frightened animals were brought to a standstill. He was a fine, handsome man, and he spoke with a foreign accent.

"Who is she, does any one know? Poor soul! poor soul!"

Then, as some policemen proposed carrying her to the hospital, he broke out hastily,—

"No, no! It was through me this accident occurred. I am responsible for her well-being. I am staying at the Charing Cross Hotel; carry her there!"

In an incredibly short time Zoë was lying in the stranger's bed, and the best medical advice had been obtained. But as the two doctors took their leave one of them said,—

"She cannot last long; she has led an intemperate life, and recovery is impossible. When she is conscious inquire who and what her friends are; they should be sent for at once."

The stranger went to his sitting-room and tried to read, but the event of the morning had unnerved him, and he could not fix his attention upon his paper. He was glad when the nurse appeared.

"If you please, sir, she is conscious, and is asking to go home."

He rose and followed her. Zoë turned her head heavily as they entered.

"My poor woman, you must try to be content here; it is impossible to move you."

At the first sound of his voice she started and flung out her hands,—

"You have found me at last!—Garnett Donato, you have found me at last!"

Slowly it dawned upon him who and what she was. Small wonder that he had not recognised her before! When last he had seen her she had been a handsome quadroon girl—scarcely darker than a brunette—now he shrank from her with a curse.

"No, no!" she cried, wildly, "don't curse me!—master!—you loved me once—before the white-faced woman stole your heart from me! Ah! how I hated her!—how I hate her now!"

"You murdered her," he answered sternly. "Your hatred cannot touch her now. But where is my child? To what life of misery and shame have you reared her? Answer me, woman! Oh, Heaven! she will die and take her secret with her!"

For Zoë had sunk back panting, with her eyes closed and her teeth set fast. He forced some brandy between them, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes unclosed.

"Zoë," he said, kneeling down, to bring his face on a level with hers, "you are dying; no human agency can help you now."

"I know, I know," she answered, impatiently. "I heard what the doctors said—in-ternal injuries, could not stop the bleeding. Well, what is it you want, Garnett Donato?"

"The truth!" fiercely. "Where is my child?"

"What if I say I don't know, or that I murdered her in cold blood; or, worse still, what if I confess I have made your dainty darling a creature for all good women to shun?"

He hid his face, groaning,—

"Are you a devil that you torture me thus?"

"Perhaps I am; but what I am you made me!" hoarsely.

Then it seemed as though the heart so long unused to tenderness, to any good or holy impulse, melted within her. Perhaps some memory of happier days, when she had been an innocent child, before her master loved her with the love that was her doom, stirred within her. Slow tears rose to her dim eyes.

"I will tell you all. Your child is Olive Byron, the tragedienne, and is as good as your heart can desire. Send for her; she will tell you all her past; send for her that I may confess all before her, and let some one take down my words."

Olive was sitting at luncheon with Miss Byron when a note was brought in to her. Breaking the seal listlessly, she began to read. Then her whole face changed; suddenly she flung her arms about her friend,—

"Oh, read! read! She has met with an accident, and is dying! Heaven forgive me! Oh! Heaven forgive me, that I am glad!"

Miss Byron took the note. It ran:

"Charing Cross Hotel.
"The woman calling herself Zoë Donato has been knocked down and mortally injured. She can last but very few hours. Come at once, as she has some important revelation to make."

In an almost incredibly short time the two women had reached the hotel, and were led upstairs to a large and airy room.

They found a nurse and a handsome middle-aged gentleman (whom Olive supposed to be the doctor) in attendance; at a far end sat another gentleman—a magistrate.

"You've come to see me die," Zoë said, speaking with great difficulty, "and in your heart you're glad to be rid of me at last. I've been an evil influence to you all your days. Sit down here, and let me tell my tale. The name 'mother' has no tender meaning for you—I know, I know! Perhaps if you had really been my child I should have been a better woman. Olive, you are no more my child than you are hers!" pointing to Miss Byron.

The girl started, and a low cry broke from

her lips; but seeing the great need of perfect self-control she restrained herself, and the failing voice went on,—

"I carried you off in revenge upon your parents; you were quite a little child, not two years old. Your father was named Garnett Donato, and like his wife, was a Creole, and one of the richest men in Cuba. Two years before his marriage he bought me of a planter, and as I was a handsome and likely girl he took me into the house. I had been a favourite with my late mistress, and she had educated me well; so when he found I could read and sing, and do many things that ladies do, he began to notice me. I learned to love him with all my soul, and he loved me too, but only as a man loves his horse or dog. Then I became his mistress, and I did not believe I sinned. I belonged to him body and soul. Slaves have no claim to morals; they are white folks' luxuries!"

"I was happy, oh! so happy, that I used to sing for joy as I went about. And he was proud of me in a way, because the gentlemen who visited him used to admire me and make much of me. For two years things went on like this; and then, one evil day, my master went to Porto Rico. He was absent a month, and when he came back I knew at once what had happened. But he must make my misery plainer to me; so he took me aside and told me he was to be married in a few weeks, and of course I could no longer stay in the house. I was to join the field hands—I, who had been like a queen among them—but he would see that my work was light, and I should have a hut to myself. I stormed and raved, I wept and entreated mercy, but I could not move him to pity."

"So I went sullenly to my new work and soon he brought his bride home. She was pale and thin, and I failed to see why he loved her, because she was not beautiful at all. But they were happy, and the sight of their happiness used to madden me, so that many a time I longed to kill her before his eyes. One day she saw me in the field, and taking a sudden fancy to me, begged she might have me in the house as her personal attendant and he dared not refuse lest she should guess what the pretty slave had been to him; for Madame had high notions of goodness, and used to say that women such as I were entitled to the respect white women claim as their due. Well, I went to wait upon her, my master having first warned me that if I disclosed anything he would sell me."

"After awhile a baby was born, and there were great doings; and because she was pleased with me, Madame made me the baby's nurse. Often and often, as you lay in my arms, I was tempted to kill you, but I bided my time, and at last it came."

"When you were about eighteen months' old, I branded your name and a serpent upon your left arm. Most slaves were branded, why should the white child go free? My mistress was very angry, my master simply furious, and, despite the former's entreaties, he had me whipped."

"Then I think every remnant of good left me. I went into the fields at night and spoke to one of the slaves—a young mulatto—offering to fly with him, as he had often urged me. He consented only too gladly, and then we parted—I to make what arrangements I could. I had more liberty than any of the others, being sent on frequent messages and errands by my mistress; and on one occasion I had noticed a Spanish ship lying in the harbour for repairs. I now inquired when she was to sail, and, having ascertained all that was necessary, returned home, apparently repentant for my past fault."

"On the night upon which we were to set sail my mistress was absent at a ball; and, entering her room, I seized on all the money and jewels I could find, and, carefully wrapping you in a cloak, started with Tony for the ship."

"Long before your loss could be discovered we were on our way to Spain. Once there, I

deserted Tony; he was stupid and ignorant, and I had no further use for him. Then I travelled through France. Of my mode of life I need say nothing—the only part of my story that can interest you is that which concerns yourself."

"I came at last to England; and one day, when you were singing in the street, a queer old gentleman stopped, and I saw he was struck with your face and voice. He asked me several questions about you, and then I offered to sell you to him for a sovereign—it seemed just the best revenge I could take. There was fine irony in the slave offering the white child for sale!"

"Well, he took you away, and I never saw you again until I came upon you in the street, and I knew you at once, because you are so like what Madame was at your age. Now, turn up your sleeve, and let these gentlemen see I have not lied."

Half mechanically Olive turned up her sleeve for Garnett Donato's inspection. To her surprise and dismay, he caught her in his arms, and kissed her passionately upon her cheek and brow.

She struggled to free herself, and then she heard his voice, broken with happy tears, calling her "his dear daughter; his darling, long-lost child."

She turned to Zoë for an explanation.

"He is—your—father," she said, feebly, and in the flush of her joy at finding her parent, it was to Miss Byron she turned for sympathy and congratulation.

If Donato were hurt by this action, he reflected it was but natural, as she had known no other love, no other care than the good soul's for many years; beside which, he was not a little afraid that the knowledge of his early sin might not tend to estrange her more from him than the long years of absence had done already.

A weak voice from the bed aroused him from his reverie.

"What is it?" he asked, more gently than he had yet addressed the dying woman.

She stretched out one claw-like hand, and feebly drew his to her lips. There was a world of entreaty in her eyes, as she murmured,—

"Master, master, we shall never hurt each other any more. You will never beat your poor, faithful Zoë again."

Her voice died out suddenly, and in a moment the sinful life was over, and who dare say that there was no pity for her in the heavens?

Donato drew Olive away, and into an adjoining room.

"My dear," he said, very tenderly, "you must try to love me, for my life has been a cruel one since you were stolen from me, and your mother died."

She put her arms about his neck.

"I will try to be all to you that a daughter should be, and you must teach me my duty. Oh, father!—father! Let us thank Heaven together for this mercy! Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear! I can lift up my head amongst other women now, and have no fear of shame!"

They laid Zoë to rest in Highgate Cemetery, and then Garnett Donato began to settle his affairs preparatory to leaving England. But he was destined to be detained some weeks longer, having found his daughter but to lose her again, or rather to give her into the keeping of the man who had loved her first and last. There is no woman so active in good work for those of her sex (especially the coloured sisters) as Lady Lindsay, the one time actress.

Garnett Donato did not return to Cuba alone. With him went a sweet-faced woman, whom we have known as Miss Byron, but whom he now calls wife.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

A DANCING-MASTER is usually very quick at figures.

THE curious motto of the old soaker: Keep Dry!

THE KINDEST OF MEN.—A sheriff's officer is a man who never leaves another in distress, especially when he is "distressed for rent."

PHOOL and Nunchad finally decided not to go into insolvency, finding on investigation that bankruptcy doesn't pay.

A PAPER says "money is idle." The luckless wights who have to pay interest on mortgages think money is, on the contrary, very industrious.

"WOULD you not call that rather a rare picture?" asked a gentleman of his companion, as they were gazing at a painting, who replied: "Well—yes. I suppose it is a rare one, for it certainly is not well done!"

THE LESS THE BETTER.—A lady being about to marry a man who was very low in stature was told he was a very bad fellow. "Well," said she, "if he is bad there's one comfort—there is very little of him!"

ONE opera-singer said to another: "My daughter has inherited my voice." "Oh!" said the other, with the most innocent air, "that is the explanation, then. I have always wondered where it was."

NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT.—"Why, Doctor," said a sick lady, "you give me the same medicine as you are giving to my husband. How's that?" "All right," replied the doctor; "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

AN angry man, standing near a donkey, was cautioned by a witty friend not to expose himself by any rash demonstration; "for, really," he added, with a mischievous glance at the donkey, "you seem to be actually beside yourself!"

NON COMMITAL.—A doctor came bustling into the house of a young married man, and in a cheerful tone asked: "Well, how is your mother-in-law to-day?" "There is no change for the better—either way," cautiously replied the son-in-law.

A BOY having complained to his father that Bill had thrown his algebra at him and hurt him on the head, the father replied: "Well, you are the only member of the family on whom mathematics ever made the least impression."

STARTLING.—A little girl, whose birthday comes on the last day of the year, thinks she had a narrow escape from not being born at all. "Ma," said she, on her last birthday anniversary, "if I hadn't been born till the next day, what would have become of me?"

"Ah!" said an iceman, "ice will be unusually high the coming season;" to which the astonished customer replied: "Why, how is that? I thought the past winter was a great one for ice?" "That's just the trouble," responded the iceman. "So much ice was gathered last winter that it will be a drag in the market, and all drugs come high, you know."

YOUNG LADY (At a reception, trying to force a conversation): "Mr. Noodlebang, what do you suppose makes all these receptions so invariably stupid?" Mr. Noodlebang: "Aw, really, I haven't the ghost of an idea." Young Lady: "And all the other gentlemen are much like you. I begin to see the reason now."

PREPARED FOR A STORM.—A few nights ago a Mr. Bodkin, who had been out taking his glass and pipe, on going home late, borrowed an umbrella, and when his wife's tongue was loosened he sat up in bed and suddenly spread out the rain shedder. "What are you doing with that thing?" said she. "Why, my dear," he gravely answered, "I expected a very heavy storm to-night, and so came prepared."

THE depression in business does not affect the barber, who—lucky dog!—holds his hone.

CONDUCTORS who are in grain gentlemen, are always car pets, as a matter of course.

THE captain ought to be altogether satisfactory, as he is made to order.

THE youth who cut open the bellows to see where the wind came from is now trying his hand at fattening greyhounds.

It is generally believed that Cowper was a Freemason, as he wished to erect "a lodge in some vast wilderness."

WHEN wool falls in price, it is supposed that the reduction takes place from sheer necessity.

SOME of the barbers use razors that show how fully they act up to the principle that old edge is honourable.

WHAT is the difference between the captain of a crack cricket eleven and a prize-fighter? One heads the batters, and the other batters the heads.

A BURGLAR having been frightened away by a young lady, her father wanted to know how she did it. "Did you threaten to shoot the rascal?" he asked. "No, pa; I looked daggers at him," she replied.

"BUT if I put my money in the savings bank," inquired one son of Erin of another, "when can I draw it out again?" "Och," replied his friend, "sure an' if you put it in to-day, you can draw it out again to-morrow by giving a fortnight's notice."

THE fashion reporters state that "bustles have been revived." This shows the forgiving disposition of the ladies, who consent to making friends with something that, as the popular expression has it, always goes back on 'em.

"ARE you going to the continent, this summer, Mr. Snaggleby?" "Well, really, I have not decided. There is only one thing to prevent it, now that the sheriff has sold me out." "And what is that, pray?" "The English Channel."

CUSTOMER: "I say, Mr. Barber, I don't hear your scissors at work on my hair." Barber: "There is very little hair on your head." Customer: "That makes no difference. I pay my money and I want you to rattle the scissors on the bald place just the same as if it had hair on it."

CORA (rapturously): "What a magnificent tree that is over there!" Merritt (putting on): "Yea, my dear. That's what Tennyson would call an immemorial monarch of the forest." Cora (inquisitively): "But how do you know it's so old?" Merritt (looking very funny): "Because I see it's a chestnut."

WHEN Ethalinda De Wiggs visited her cousins in the country last week one of them said: "Linda, don't you want to help me pick peas this morning?" "I'd like to, dear," replied Ethalinda, "but I am not properly dressed for picking peas." "Why, how's that?" "I forgot to bring a peasjacket with me."

THE AILMENT THAT AFFLICTED MOLLIE.—A young lady having "set her cap" for a rather large specimen of the opposite sex, and having failed to win him, was telling her sorrows to a couple of her confidants, when one of them said: "Never mind, Mollie; there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught." "Mollie knows that," replied her little brother, "but she wants a whale!"

AN ARTFUL DODGE.—An avaricious fellow in Brussels gave a large dinner. Just as the guests sat down, a piercing shriek was heard in the courtyard. The host hurried out, and returned pale, affrighted, and his hands covered with blood. "What is it?" was the inquiry. "Alas!" he said, "a poor workman, father of a large family, has met with a terrible accident: he was knocked down by a cart and grievously wounded. Let us aid him." A collection was taken up, and the guests contributed twelve hundred francs. It was the miser's ruse to make them pay for the dinner.

Is a bride to be called a blockhead simply because she is wooed an' won?

A SHOPKEEPER has the counter on which he keeps his bathing-suits labelled "divers fancies."

MR. PIESNAP: "Waiter, here is a button in the soup." Waiter: "Ah, yes—the cook's. Well, you can have it. He'll never miss it."

SELF BETRAYAL: "Why do you lock your door so carefully?" "I take every precaution that no thief gets in until I enter."

A PIOUS old lady recently sent as wedding presents a pair of flat-irons, a rolling-pin, and a motto worked on cardboard, reading: "Fight on."

"DO read my last poem and give me your honest opinion." "If I tell you it is bad, you will not believe it; and if I tell you it is good, I will not believe it."

"JACK: I think that fellow, Crageby, is a perfect liar." Edith: "Yes; but there is a variety in his lying." Jack: "How so?" Edith: "Because he sometimes lies awake, and sometimes he lies asleep."

"AH, Longjaw! up to your eyes in work, eh? What are you doing? Remodelling your lecture for next season?" "Bless you, no! I've no time to do anything with the lecture. I'm just remodelling the press notices."

A GEOMETRICAL JOKE: "Polly, the cook, has left us," said she, in deep distress. "Now what sort of shape are we in?" "In the shape of a polygon," he responded, with great glee.

AFFECTIONATE WIFE (to husband): "You say you can't take me to Scarborough this summer? Why, there's Ditchitts—he's going to take his wife for the whole summer." Husband: "Yes. But my dear, Ditchitts has just failed—I have not."

"WHAT is that big iron thing, full of holes?" asked Laura. "Locomotive boiler," said Tom. Laura looked thoughtful. After a moment's silence, she asked: "No? Why do they boil locomotives?" Tom looked amazed. "To make 'em tender," he said, slowly.

JUST AFTER A SERIOUS QUARREL.—Mrs. Dusenberry (sobbing): "Oh, it's just dreadful to be disappointed in love!" Mr. Dusenberry: "There's something a good deal worse than that." "What, pray?" "To be disappointed in marriage."

"OH, yes," wrote a man who believes that his own home is the coolest spot on earth in midsummer, "it is all very well for you to ask me to come down to your famous hotel for rest and change. I tried it once. The porter got all the change, and the landlord took the rest."

THE story is told of a Scotch wife, shortly after the nuptial knot had been tied, mildly expostulating with her husband for indulging in two tumbler of whisky-toddy just before going to bed. "My dear Agnes, a glass o' whisky-toddy makes another man o' me." "But my dear William, you take two." "Ay, Agnes, that gangs to the other man."

"TILDIE," he murmured, "will you be my wife?" Tildie had her mouth made up to say, "It's so sudden, you know," prior to falling into his arms. But list—he continues: "You know, Tildie, it's a very small favour I ask of you. Can you not grant it?" Tildie didn't have anything to say in regard to suddenness, and she didn't fall into his arms. She merely remarked, with fine emphasis, "Small favour!" and flounced out of the room with an energy worthy of a better cause.

"I SEE a medical journal says that toothache may frequently be cured by placing a silver coin on one side of the gum and a small piece of zinc on the other. It generates an electric current, you know, that stops the pain. By-the-way, Charlie, could you let me take a bob till I try it on this tooth of mine?" "Sorry, George, old boy; but fact is, I haven't it. Let you have a tanner, though, old fellow, if that'll relieve your pain at all." "Thanks, awfully, dear boy. I think that'll help it a little!"

SOCIETY.

THE Queen has graciously signified her willingness to open the Metropolitan Free Hospital, in the Kingsland-road, on a date which has yet to be fixed. The building is rapidly approaching completion.

THE Queen's movements at Balmoral have up to the present been nothing but an exciting record of walks and drives. The usual cottagers have been visited, and excursions to sundry haunts, sanctified by memories attaching to them, are being made by Her Majesty. The weather has been such as to enable the Court circle to get the greatest enjoyment out of life in the open air. The Duke and Duchess of Connaught have left for India. The children stay with the Queen.

We are able to state, says *Modern Society*, that the Princess of Wales has never, as alleged, given up the idea of visiting her parents at Copenhagen this summer, and unless something very unexpected happens, she will proceed there shortly in company with her daughters. The change has benefited Her Royal Highness considerably, and the young Princesses have fairly broken loose during their stay at Schwalbach.

THERE is still much gaiety in Dublin, and every effort is being made to bring the Irish City back to its former self. The Royal Irish Horticultural Show, which was recently held in the beautiful grounds of Sir Edward Guinness, was a big success. Among the visitors were Prince and Princess Edward of Saxe-Weimar, the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn, the Marchioness of Drogheda, Lady Albert Seymour, and Lady Guinness.

Princess Edward was attired in a costume and jacket of navy blue poplin trimmed with velvet; a blue straw bonnet with dark red poppies. The Duchess of Abercorn wore a gown of black yak lace, a small mantelet of blue velvet, and a bronze bonnet with aigrette. Mrs. Taaffe Farrall had a black lace dress, velvet and jet mantelet, and lace bonnet.

Lady Arnot wore a white woollen costume, the jacket braided in gold, and a panel of gold embroidery on the skirt; the hat to correspond. A noticeable dress was of blue spotted foulard, trimmed with lace; a dark blue hat, ornamented with blue ribbons and large cluster of poppies.

TORQUAY has been very cheery during the Regatta week, and the ball at the Bath Saloon on the 24th ult. was crowded. The terraces overlooking the sea were a perfect lounge, and were patronized very freely and beauty was well represented.

Mrs. Sebright has seldom looked handsomer than she did then in vivid poppy red tulle; Mrs. Thellusson was universally admired in white satin and diamonds; and Mrs. Kemys-Tynte was a vision of golden loveliness, in a gold-coloured robe, with diamonds on the bodice, and carrying two bouquets of creamy roses.

Miss Oxendon in white tulle and Miss Sinclair were both most charming. We never saw a ball better supplied with men, but they hung about the doors even more than usual, and danced but little. Lord Churston brought a large party.

CAPTAIN FRASER and the officers of H.M.S. *Excellent*, gave at Portsmouth, the other afternoon, an excellent dance and At Home. There was a very large attendance of the *élite* of Southsea and Portsmouth, upwards of seven hundred invitations having been issued.

The dresses were for the most part white, either cambric or embroidered muslin, varied by different coloured sashes and natural flowers. A great many of the younger ladies wore simple washing crotches and cottons, with velvet collars and cuffs; and one somewhat remarkable costume was of white tulle, with bretelles of pale blue satin, and blue satin bonnet.

Small transparent white bonnets, without strings were more worn than hats.

STATISTICS.

THE PROTESTANT ELEMENT IN ULSTER.—In view of the impression which quite generally prevails that the Protestant population of Ulster, Ireland, so overwhelmingly preponderates that the rest of the population need not be taken into account, the following facts have an immediate interest:—In October last a return was issued by Parliament at the instance of Mr. T. M. Healy, showing the religious denominations of the population of each constituency formed in Ulster by the "Redistribution of Seats Act," which shows that the population of Ulster is divisible into two distinctly different portions, namely, fifty-eight per cent. occupying about three-fourths of its surface and forty-two per cent. on the fourth which remains. The surface of Ulster occupied by the fifty-eight per cent. comprises the entire western, central and southern counties, as well as a portion of the south-eastern—that is to say—Donegal, Tyrone, Londonderry, Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan, and the southern divisions of Armagh and Down. On the other hand, the forty-two per cent. may almost be said to be crammed within the limits of a couple of counties, and, as a matter of strict fact, they occupy the whole of Antrim, three-fourths of Down and two-thirds of Armagh. Therefore, instead of Ulster being a Protestant province, it is simply a province whose extreme eastern portion is overwhelmingly Protestant in contrast with the western, central and southern portions, which are overwhelmingly Catholic. "Where, then, is the 'Orange North?'" If there be such a place at all, it is to be found only in a corner of Ulster, and even in that corner it appears that the Catholics, who are assumed by the Loyalists to be Nationalists to a man, number 200,000. And the Protestants in Ulster outnumber the Catholics by only 75,947.

GEMS.

HYPOCRISY of manners, a vice peculiar to modern nations, has contributed more than one thinks to destroy that energy of character which distinguished the nations of antiquity.

THERE is no one made so great but may both need the help and service, and stand in fear of the power and unkindness, even of the meanest mortals.

A good conscience is a marvellous restorative. One looks with hope to the future when one feels justified in turning with pride to the past.

The truest of mothers can hardly be expected to reconcile herself with ease to a new face on her child; she has loved him in one shape, and she has now to love him in another.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

QUINCE MARMALADE.—Take the quinces that you have boiled for jelly, and mash them with a spoon; to a pound of quinces, take a pound of sugar; boil them together until they are well softened; then strain through a coarse sieve, and put up in small jars.

TOMATO JAM.—Peel ripe tomatoes, taking out all seeds put in preserving-kettle, with one half-pound of sugar to each pound of prepared tomato; boil two lemons soft, and pound them fine; take out the pips, and add to the tomato; boil slowly, mashing to a smooth mass; when smooth and thick, put in jars and tumblers.

QUINCE JELLY.—Slice the quinces without either paring or coring; put them into a preserving-kettle, and just cover with water; put over the fire, and boil until soft; remove from the stove, and strain off the liquor; to every gallon, add four pounds of white sugar, and boil very fast, until it becomes a stiff jelly.

MISCELLANEOUS.

EFFECTIVE.—With white and black costumes posies of green, without flowers, are very effective.

THE highest astronomical observatory in Europe is now being erected at Sonnbliek, one of the Tyrolean Alps. The solitary resident observer, who will be two thousand feet above any house, will conduct his intercourse with mankind by means of the telephone wire.

PAIN itself is not without its alleviations. It may be violent and frequent, but it is seldom both violent and long continued, and its pauses and intermissions become positive pleasures. It has the power of shedding a satisfaction over intervals of ease, which, I believe, few enjoyments exceed.

"It seems," says the *Lancet*, "that the little toy balloons of India-rubber bladders which children inflate with the breath may be readily reversed by inspiration, and even drawn into air passages. In two instances recently death has occurred by suffocation, a balloon of the sort being drawn into the opening of the glottis. This is a matter of danger which ought to be recognised. Parents and nurses should be on their guard."

A CURIOUS CHAIN.—A strange chain of causes, recently brought about the death of a little boy. The poor child at during the day, a quantity of sorrel which he found near his father's house. In the night, feeling thirsty, he drank freely of some soapy water which stood near his bedside. Next day he died, and an inquest being held, the medical evidence was to the effect that the alkali of the soap, acting upon the sorrel had formed oxalic acid, a poisonous compound, by which the child had been killed.

IMPALPABLE.—The bed of the ocean is to an enormous extent covered with lava and pumice stone. Still more remarkable is it to find the floor of the ocean covered in many parts with the dust of the meteorites. These are like miniature comets, and are for the most part broken into innumerable fragments. We are all familiar with the heavenly visitants as shooting-stars, but it has been only lately discovered that this cosmic dust forms layers at the bottom of the deepest seas. Between Honolulu and Tahiti, at a depth of 2,350 fathoms—over two miles and a half—a vast layer of this material exists. Falling upon land this impalpable dust is undistinguishable; but accumulating for centuries in the sea depths, it forms a wondrous story of continuous bombardment of this planet by cometary bodies.

THE FIRST CRAZE FOR OLD CHINA.—Towards the end of the seventeenth century the potters of Rouen and Delft found it necessary to protect themselves against the Oriental invasion which at that time threatened extinction to their trade, and could think of nothing better than to copy as well as they might the Chinese designs and manner of working. In this way they gained a degree of skill that many of them afterward used in turning the more slightly decorated Chinese porcelains, among the constantly increasing importations, into something like the more richly decorated and therefore costlier ones. At first their object in doing this may have been to experiment on the hard Chinese paste before trying the same colours on the soft, false porcelain that had already been invented in France; but their attempts were not long confined, if they ever were, to this justifiable end. There soon grew up a new industry, which had for its purpose to enrich, to suit the taste of purchasers, those pieces of Chinese ware of which the decoration was considered too simple. In the presence of a collection of veritable Chinese works of high class it is easy to detect the halting and heavy touch, the pale colouring tending to brown and purple, and the predilection for rounded forms and effects of aerial perspective of the European artist.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BESSY.—We do not know her present address.

T. M.—No.

AMY.—We know of none of the material named.

DONOTHY.—We do not give business addresses under any circumstances.

J. W.—Your handwriting is quite fitted for a clerk in a merchant's office.

M. C.—We are not acquainted with the address of the gentleman you mention.

BETTY.—Phryne, the name of a noted woman of the latter part of the fourth century B.C., is pronounced as if written *fray-ney*.

W. F. M.—The missing number can be obtained by writing direct to the office and enclosing three-halfpence in stamps.

SUE.—Polygamy was introduced among the Mormons by a "revelation" to Joseph Smith in 1843, but for some years only existed secretly.

LUCK.—The royal palace in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, consists of a huge quadrangle of solid granite. It is remarkable for the chaotic yet massive style of its Italian architecture.

EDDIE.—Cuba was discovered by Columbus on October 28, 1492. It was given several names, but none of them supplanted that of Cuba, by which it was known to the natives.

M. C. S.—We have not seen the book referred to, but if you will again carefully examine the story, you will find that it is not the same. Your other question can only be answered on receipt of your proper name and address.

N. J. P.—A lute is a musical instrument of the guitar species, formerly in general use, but long superseded by the harp and guitar. It is supposed to be of Eastern origin, and its invention has been ascribed to the Arabs.

E. G. W.—Liverpool is the most densely populated city in England. The Parliamentary borough is governed by sixteen aldermen and forty-eight councillors, one of whom is mayor. The corporation is distinguished for its wealth and liberality.

L. H.—Most of the meerschaum comes from Asia Minor, near the town of Konieh, where it is dug from the earth. It is sent to other countries either in rough blocks or in partly shaped pipes, which are afterwards finished by workmen skilled in the business. A large number are made in Vienna and Pesth.

S. N. W.—You are very weak and foolish to allow such trifling to distract your affection from your husband and children. It can only lead you to misery and dishonour. Cast off the infatuation at once, and return to your tempter all letters or papers he may have had the impudence to address to you. Make your husband aware of all such attentions.

LETTIE.—Olla-podrida (pronounced ol-la-po-dry-da) is a Spanish national dish, consisting of several kinds of meat cut up into small pieces, and stewed with a variety of vegetables. The dish is a great favourite with the poor, and is kept so long that its odour and flavour become highly offensive. It is commonly used like *pot pourri* (pronounced po-poor-ee) metaphorically to denote a medley.

E. H. A.—Ox gall, the bile of the ox, is a viscid green or greenish yellow fluid, of bitter and slightly sweetish taste, found chiefly in a membranous bag in the ox. It is sometimes very limpid and at other times like a syrup. It is the properties which it possesses which render it of value to the arts, for it dissolves greasy matters on ivory, and for cleaning woollen stuffs it is sometimes preferred to soap. It is much used by artists on account of its combining with colours and increasing their lustre.

C. W. T.—Probably not, at least not by any legal proceedings. In a court of law such a declaration made by her, and acted upon by the gentleman before it had been withdrawn, would be looked upon as an annulment of the engagement. But if the gentleman really loves her, and, like herself, was acting from momentary irritation, she would stand a chance of bringing him round, if she should happen to meet him under auspicious circumstances. Such a case should, if possible, be tried in the court of Cupid, rather than in a court of law.

CORRECTION.—Bull Run is a small stream in North-east Virginia, which, after a south-east course of twenty miles, falls into the Occoquan, a tributary of the Potomac, about twenty-five miles from Washington. The two important battles of the American civil war fought upon its banks occurred on July 21, 1861, and August 29-30, 1862. By the Confederates the two battles are styled the first and second battles of Manassas. Some authorities give the name of Bull Run to that of 1861, and Groveton to that of 1862, from a hamlet near the battle-field.

E. C. C.—Ghee is a kind of butter used in many parts of India, prepared generally from the milk of buffaloes. The milk is successively boiled, cooled, and mixed with a little curdled milk. The process is completed by churning the curdled mass, to which some hot water is once added. It is an article of commerce in India, but unpalatable to Europeans from its strong smell and flavour. It is said that it may be kept from rancidity by boiling until all the water is evaporated, and then adding curdled milk and salt, and preserving it in close jars. It is pronounced *ge*.

LILLIE.—Light brown.

E. G. T.—The invariable rule of the road is that a coachman shall keep on the left side.

R. V. D.—We are not acquainted with the novel named.

J. R. S.—Ordinary paint of the best quality is the best.

P. S. W.—The law of distress for rent is no doubt arbitrary, but you have no alternative but submission.

BEVEL.—1. Tied with yellow, dark brown; tied with blue, nut brown. 2. Blue or brown eyes would suit either. 3. The 24th of May, 1870, came on a Tuesday.

CONSTANT READER (THUR).—We should not advise you, under any circumstances, to have anything whatever to do with foreign lotteries.

A. J.—The best thing to promote the growth of whiskers and moustaches is a mixture of tincture of cantharides and sweet oil; any chemist will give you the proportions.

GUY S.—We do not give prizes, but we pay for accepted stories according to what we deem their value. Send the story, and it shall receive our prompt attention, but we cannot guarantee its return if rejected.

GLADYS LEIGH.—1. To cure blushing mix as much as you can in society. It will soon wear off. 2. Let your friend live well, take plenty of exercise, and practise athletics a little. 3. We do not believe in the so-called interpretation of dreams. 4. Fair writing.

HOUSEKEEPER.—A most excellent liquid-bluing for clothes is prepared by placing 1 ounce of finely powdered soluble Prussian blue in a bottle with 1 quart of clear rain-water, and then adding to it 1 ounce of oxalic acid. A teaspoonful of this mixture is sufficient for a large washing.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

Wealth and glory, and place and power,
What are they worth to me or you?
For the lease of life runs out in an hour,
And death stands ready to claim his due;
Sounding honours or heaps of gold,
What are they when all is told?

A pain or a pleasure, a smile or a tear—
What does it matter which we claim?
For we step from the cradle into the bier,
And a careless world goes on the same.
Hours of gladness or hours of sorrow,
What does it matter to us to-morrow?

Truth of love or vow of friend—
Tender caresses or cruel sneers—
What do they matter to us in the end?
For the brief day dies, and the long night nears.
Passionate kisses, or tears of gall,
The grave will open and cover them all.

Homeless vagrant, or honoured guest,
Poor and humble, or rich and great,
All are racked with the world's unrest,
All must meet with the common fate.
Life from childhood till we are old,
What is it all when all is told?

E. W. W.

LETTER.—Lynne Regis is a Parliamentary borough and sea-port of Dorsetshire. It has recently become a fashionable watering-place, with libraries, assembly-rooms, &c. The town lies between two rocky hills, a portion of it being on their steep sides. It is well-built, well-paved, and well-lighted. It has a good harbour, protected by a semicircular pier. It is 22 miles west of Dorchester.

N. M.—You are probably both too young to think of marriage, and as your beau is yet at school, you had better not build too much upon his attention. These youthful attachments seldom ripen into matrimony. Do not take the failure of your beau to write very seriously. He is probably wholly taken up with his lessons and companions, which is natural. When he returns home he will be just as ready to wait upon you and avow his love for you as in the past. Marriage implies that the man shall have some means, and a regular employment and income.

EMIGRANT.—Southern California is said to possess a better climate than Italy. South of San Francisco and in the San Joaquin valley frost is rarely known. Roses bloom throughout the winter, and many trees retain their foliage green the year round. The air, peculiarly warm and dry, is very healthful and favourable to consumptive and persons subject to disease of the throat. For this reason, San Diego, Santa Barbara, San Bernardino, Stockton, and Visalia have become popular winter resorts for invalids. In regard to epidemic diseases the climate of California is deemed remarkably adverse to them. Malarious fevers occur in many of the interior valleys, but they are not generally of a severe type. California has a rainy and a dry season, the former nearly corresponding to the winter and the latter to the summer of the Atlantic region. The rains begin at the north early in autumn, but do not fall in the latitude of San Francisco, in any appreciable quantity, until about the middle of December, which is the month of greatest rain. The rainy season terminates toward the end of May. It has been estimated that in the latitude referred to there are on an average 220 perfectly clear days in a year; 85 days more or less cloudy; and 60 rainy. A marked phenomenon of the climate is the comparative absence of thunder and lightning. Earthquake shocks are quite frequent in California, but they rarely do any great damage.

M. D.—No fault can be found with your penmanship or grammar.

M. D. D.—The locks of hair enclosed are light and dark brown.

T. T. L.—It is not necessary to use black-bordered paper in the case referred to.

P. M. G.—To clarify honey, melt the honey in a water bath, remove the scum, and pour off the clear.

E. H.—It is etiquette to leave on your plate a little of the articles of food partaken of, to indicate that you have had a sufficiency of it.

E. O. H.—We cannot recommend colouring the hair; for all hair dyes are more or less injurious. Let them alone.

W. L.—Putty is made by mixing common whiting, pounded very fine, with linseed oil, until it becomes about the consistency of dough.

E. L. D.—William Henry Waddington, a distinguished archaeologist, was born in Paris in 1826. His parents were English Protestants. His second wife was Miss King, of New York, whom he married in 1875.

F. W.—The liver is the largest organ in the body, weighing about four pounds. Its office is to secrete bile. It lies under the short ribs on the right side, below the diaphragm.

L. M. N.—The word gillie comes from an old Gaelic term that means a boy, a lad, or page. Gillie now means a personal attendant who occupies a menial position.

E. D. S.—Moles cannot be removed from the skin without doing it an injury or disfiguring its surface. They do no harm, and it is advisable in all cases to let them alone.

A. M.—No portion of this column is ever devoted to the discussion of religious questions, which should be settled among the disputants, and not referred to outside authorities.

ALFONSO.—1. Both locks of hair are of a dark auburn hue. 2. Lady No. 1 would be called a demi-brunette, while No. 2 has all the characteristics of a demi-blonde. 3. Yes; they are accepted in sums less than one sovereign.

T. S. S.—A lady may speak first to a gentleman to whom she has previously been properly introduced. There is no more harm in dancing with a gentleman with a red moustache than with one who has none at all or a black one.

G. T. D.—As the charges made by professional scourers and dyers are so small, comparatively speaking, why not have the suit cleaned properly by an experienced person? You will find it surprising but easy to perform the operation yourself, and will in all probability be disgusted with the appearance of the clothes.

B. T.—Gelatine mixed with glycerine yields a compound liquid when hot, but becomes solid on cooling, at the same time retaining much elasticity. Buttons may be hermetically sealed by dipping their necks into the liquid mixture, and repeating the operation until the cap attains the desired thickness.

G. R.—Flour, plaster of Paris, and even marble-dust, are said to be extensively used in the manufacture of cheap confectionery. The first-mentioned substance, however, does not exercise any bad effects upon the human system, but the other articles are highly deleterious, being sure to produce indigestion, inflammation, and other stomach troubles.

M. S. H.—Ormuz is a small island at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. In the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese were the great traders with the East, they took possession of this barren little island, and made it the great place of exchange for the products of Europe and Asia. It is to this period of its prosperity that Milton refers.

AMY S.—Indigo is insoluble in water or alcohol, but is readily dissolved in sulphuric acid, which, without destroying its blue colour, so far alters its nature as to render it freely soluble in water, thus affording a convenient method of applying it to the purposes of dyeing. The solution with sulphuric acid is kept in the shops under the name of sulphate of indigo. It is also soluble in nitro-benzol. At their boiling points, the following substances will dissolve this material: Castor oil, acetone, hydrate of chloral, camphor, oil of turpentine, balsam of opoponax, amylic alcohol, oil of lavender, white beeswax, Japanese vegetable wax, and Carnauba wax.

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